

STORIES AND LEGENDS

STEFAN ZWEIG

*Translations by Eden and Cedar Paul
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TWENTY-FOUR HOURS IN A WOMAN'S LIFE



TEN years before the war, I was wintering on the Riviera, and had taken up my quarters in a small boarding-house. At our table a lively discussion was in progress. Imperceptibly, the conversation had degenerated into a fierce dispute, tending even to become a quarrel and an exchange of insults. Most people have very little imagination. They are hardly moved by anything which does not directly touch them, which does not positively hammer its message upon their senses; but even a trifle, should it happen under their very eyes, and within the immediate range of their feelings, will instantly kindle in them a disproportionate amount of passion. We may say that the rarity of their interest is compensated by an inappropriate and exaggerated vehemence when their interest is at last aroused.

It was just like this in the case of our middle-class company at table. Ordinarily they were content with innocent small talk, with little, unmeaning jokes; and they usually departed their several ways as soon as the meal was finished: the German married couple, to excursions and amateur photography; the portly Dane, to his tedious fishing; the distinguished English lady, to her books; the Italian honeymooners, to a Monte Carlo jaunt; and I myself, to lounge in a deck-chair, or to work. This time, however, we all kept our places, crowded together in our wrangle. If one or another jumped up for a moment, it was not in order to take leave of the com-

pany, but simply an expression of overheated passion, flaming up into rage.

The affair which had disturbed our little circle so much, was, indeed, a strange one. To outward seeming, the boarding-house in which we seven were staying was a detached villa, with a wonderful view from the windows upon the rocky shore. In reality, it was an inexpensive annex of the huge Palace Hotel, being connected with this hotel by the garden, so that we in the dependency associated freely with the guests in the main building. The day before, there had been a great to-do in the hotel. By the twelve-twenty train (it is necessary to be precise, since the hour has an important bearing upon what happened, and upon our angry conversation), a young Frenchman had arrived, and had engaged a front room, looking seaward. His choice of quarters was already enough to show that he must be fairly well off. He was noteworthy, not merely because he was fashionably though quietly dressed, but also because he was extraordinarily and attractively handsome. His face was narrow, and rather feminine in type. His warm and sensual mouth was surmounted by a fair, silky moustache. His hair was brown and soft, with a pleasing wave in it. His eyes had a caressive expression. Indeed his whole aspect was charming and amiable, and yet perfectly simple, free from affectation. It is true that at the first glance his appearance recalled one of those pink-and-white wax figures which are to be seen in fashionable shop windows; those splendid young men who simper, elegant walking-cane in hand, as representatives of the ideal of manly beauty. But a closer examination counteracted this unpleasant impression, and the observer came to realize that he had to do with one of those very rare instances in which amiability is natural and inborn.

The newcomer greeted every one in a way that was at once modest and cordial. It was a real pleasure to

observe the spontaneity with which he gave rein to his good nature, and how he seized every opportunity to render kindly service. He hastened to forestall any lady who went to the hall to fetch her cloak; had a friendly glance or an amusing word for the children; was obliging, without making a nuisance of himself—in a word, he was one of those fortunate beings who, having learned by experience that others took pleasure in his youth and good looks, derived additional charm from the knowledge of this. Upon the other guests, most of whom were elderly individuals, his presence acted like a tonic. With the victorious progress of youth, with his endowments of light-heartedness and overflowing vitality, he had irresistibly aroused the sympathies of all the others. Within two hours of his arrival, he was playing tennis with the two daughters of the stout and comfortable-looking Lyons manufacturer, girls of twelve and thirteen, Annette and Blanche by name. Their mother, Madame Henriette, a reserved, delicate, and refined woman, looked on smilingly at the un-selfconscious way in which the two flappers were flirting with the young stranger. In the evening he whiled away an hour with us over the chess-board, unobtrusively telling us two or three good stories. Then he strolled up and down the terrace chatting with Madame Henriette, whose husband was deep in a game of dominoes with a business friend. Later in the evening I saw him in the office, having a confidential talk—almost too confidential a talk—with the lady secretary of the hotel. Next morning, he went fishing with the Dane, showing himself marvellously well informed about this sport. Then he had a long conversation with the Lyons manufacturer. They discussed politics; and the young Frenchman was obviously an amusing talker, for the older man's loud laughter was heard again and again above the roar of the sea.

After the midday meal (I cannot make the situation

clear unless I recount all these details), he sat for an hour with Madame Henriette over a cup of coffee in the garden; played tennis once more with the two girls; and then had a talk with the German married couple in the hall. At six o'clock, I met him at the railway station, whither I had gone to post a letter. He came up to me with hasty strides, telling me that he must bid me farewell. He had been called away suddenly, but would be back in a couple of days. He was, in fact, missing at late dinner; but though absent in the body, he was present in the spirit, for he was the main topic of conversation, and at every table the guests were extolling his pleasant and cheerful manners.

At night, probably towards eleven, I was sitting in my room over a book I wished to finish, when suddenly, through the open window, I heard a noise in the garden, people calling to one another, while obviously something was afoot in the hotel. Moved by uneasiness rather than by curiosity, I hurried across the fifty yards or so which separated the annex from the hotel, to find the guests and the staff in a turmoil of excitement. Madame Henriette's husband had, as usual at that hour, been playing dominoes with his friend from Namur, but the lady had not returned from her evening stroll along the sea-front, and every one had become afraid that some accident had befallen her. The husband, a man of cumbersome build, but contented and easy-going as a rule, kept on running to the sea-front like a frightened beast. When, in a voice made harsh by excitement, he again and again shouted, "Henriette! Henriette!" the sound was terrible and primitive, like the cry of a huge animal suddenly stricken to the death. The waiters and the messenger boys tore up and down the stairs, waking all the guests. The manager telephoned to the police. Meanwhile, the fat husband, waistcoat unbuttoned, floundered about, foolishly continuing to shout, "Henriette! Henriette!"

in a voice that was betwixt a sob and a shriek. By now, the girls were awake, and stood at the window in their nightdresses calling for their mother. Thereupon the father hurried upstairs in the hope of quieting them.

Now there happened something so dreadful that I can hardly find words in which to describe it; for in times of exceptional stress, nature will often give people's behaviour so tragical a complexion that neither a picture nor a verbal description is competent to represent its titanic energy.

Suddenly the thick-set, corpulent man came down the stairs with a changed countenance. He looked both weary and fierce. There was an open letter in his hand.

"Call all your people in!" he said to the major-domo, speaking now in a controlled voice. "There is nothing more for them to do. My wife has run away."

There was, I repeat, self-control in the demeanour of this man who had just received a mortal wound. He displayed superhuman self-control before all the people who inquisitively thronged round him, stared at him, and then (at once alarmed and ashamed) turned away from him in confusion. He had strength enough left to stagger past us without looking any of us in the face. Going into the reading-room, he switched off the lights. We heard his massive form flop into an armchair. Then there came a wild and animal sobbing, the tears of a man who has not wept since childhood. This expression of elemental pain had a numbing influence upon all of us, even the most frivolous. Not one of the waiters, not one of the quidnuncs among the guests, ventured either to smile or to say a word of concern. In silence, as if shamed by this shattering explosion of grief, we crept away one after another to our rooms, while in solitude and darkness this stricken fragment of humanity continued to sob and gasp—utterly alone in the great hotel, which was full of whispers for a time, but gradually sub-

sided into darkness, and (except for the man's sobbing) into silence.

It could be readily understood that so moving an event occurring suddenly and unexpectedly under our eyes, was calculated to make a strong impression upon persons who were in general free from care, and who ordinarily had nothing better to do than seek distraction from boredom. But the dispute which broke out at our table, the dispute in which the parties nearly came to blows, though it arose out of the incident just recorded, was in essence the expression of differences on point of principle, was an angry confrontation of two opposing views of life. In his futile rage, the forsaken husband had crumpled up the letter and thrown it on the floor of the reading-room. One of the maids had picked it up and read it. Through her gossiping tongue, it became generally known that Madame Henriette had gone off with a companion, had decamped with the young Frenchman. At this news, the kindly feeling most of the guests had felt for the stranger began to wane. Of course it was natural enough that this little Madame Bovary should have left the dull, fat provincial who was her husband, to cast in her lot with a debonair and handsome youth. But what had outraged every one in the place was this—neither the manufacturer nor his daughters nor Madame Henriette had ever seen this Lovelace before; that two-hours' conversation in the evening upon the terrace, and an hour's talk over the coffee-cups next day, should have sufficed to induce a hitherto respectable married woman of perhaps three-and-thirty to leave her husband and her two children and to entrust her fortunes to the caprices of a total stranger.

Such were the ostensible circumstances. But with one voice the members of our little company agreed that the lovers must have perpetrated a shameful deception. Obviously, Madame Henriette must long ere this have

been secretly carrying on with the young man, and the Pied Piper had only come to arrange with her the last details of their flight. Surely it was impossible that a respectable woman should run away with a man after no more than a few hours' acquaintance, at the first beckon! Thus ran the chorus. Well, it amused me to maintain a different view. I energetically declared that it was possible, even probable, for this to happen when a woman had for years been disillusioned by her marriage, or had been so hopelessly bored by it that she was ready to succumb to the first energetic onslaught. My unexpected intervention soon gave rise to a general discussion, which became acrimonious because the two married couples, both the German and the Italian, contemptuously denied the possibility of love at first sight. In terms that almost overstepped the bounds of courtesy, they said that to talk of such a thing was folly, and that it was a fiction of the novelists' imagination.

There would be no object in trying to describe, in full detail, the course of this discussion which raged stormily from soup to pudding. None but professional diners-out are witty in such conversations. Arguments that crop up in the heat of a chance dispute at table are usually trivial, precisely because they are extemporized, because they are conceived in haste. Moreover, it would be difficult to explain why our dispute so quickly grew heated. I think a sense of irritation first came into the atmosphere because both husbands wanted to make it perfectly clear that their own wives were absolutely exempt from the risk of behaving in any such harebrained fashion. As luck would have it, they could find no better way of expressing this opinion than to tell me that a man could not hold my views unless he judged the feminine psyche on the strength of the chance conquests, the easy successes, of a bachelor. This had already raised my dander a little! But when the German lady went on to sauce the

unpalatable meat by saying that there were two kinds of women, "genuine women" on the one hand and "prostitute natures" on the other, and that in her view Madame Henriette must be placed in the latter category, I completely lost patience, and assumed the offensive. I said that all this shirking of the plain fact that in many hours of her life a woman passes under the sway of mysterious powers lying beyond the control of her will and her knowledge, all this suppression, served merely to conceal our dread of our own instincts, our fear of the elemental forces of our own nature. Many people, I declared, seemed to take pleasure in giving themselves out to be stronger, more moral, and purer than "those who were easily led astray." For my part, I thought a woman more honourable if she freely and passionately gave rein to her instinct, instead of, after the manner of women in general, closing her eyes and betraying her husband while clasped in his embrace.

That, more or less, was what I said. Of course by now the conversation had become embittered; and the more savagely the others attacked poor Madame Henriette, the more ardently did I defend her (going as one's way is when excited, far beyond the range of my sober feelings). For the two married couples, my fervour was like the insult with which a student provokes a duel. Though they formed a discordant quartette, they were well able to join forces for their vicious attack upon me. So furious did we become that the elderly Dane, looking on jovially (reminding me of the referee at a football match who stands stop-watch in hand), had several times to rap the table admonishingly with his knuckles: "Gentlemen, please!" This intervention could bring comparative peace for a moment only. Thrice, already, one of the married men had sprung to his feet, flushed with anger, and had with difficulty been pacified by his wife. Beyond question, in a few minutes, we should have come to

blows, had not Mrs. C. thrown oil on the troubled waters of our conversation.

Mrs. C., an elderly Englishwoman, white-haired, and of distinguished appearance, had, without formal election, become the presiding genius at our table. As she sat there very upright, showing an equable friendliness towards every one of us, somewhat taciturn but a most agreeable listener, her outward appearance alone was congenial enough; a wonderful composure seemed to radiate from her reserved and aristocratic personality. She kept us at a certain distance, although, with fine tact, she always knew when to be friendly and companionable. As a rule she sat reading in the garden; sometimes she played the piano; very rarely was she to be seen in intimate talk with any one. She was inconspicuous, and yet she exercised a strange power over her fellow guests. On this occasion, for instance, the instant she spoke we unanimously began to feel ashamed of ourselves, aware that we had been behaving in an unseemly fashion.

Mrs. C. took advantage of this awkward pause that ensued when the German had sprung to his feet and had then been induced to sit down again. Unexpectedly, she raised her clear, grey eyes, looked at me dubiously for a moment, and then, with remarkable clarity, took up the topic from her own point of view.

"If I understand you rightly, you think that Madame Henriette may have quite innocently and without premeditation found herself involved in this adventure; that such a thing may happen to any woman; that she may engage in actions which an hour before would have seemed to her impossible, and for which she can hardly be held accountable?"

"Certainly I think so!"

"But that would make our moral judgments unmeaning, and would justify any breach of the code. If you really believe that the *crime passionnel*, as the French term

it, is not a crime at all, why should there be a judicial system? Any one with the will to do so—and," she added with a smile, "your will obviously seems to be inclined in this direction—could find a passion underlying every crime, and could excuse the crime in consequence."

The clear and I might almost say cheerful tone in which she spoke was very pleasurable to me. Involuntarily imitating her manner, I, too, answered half in jest and half in earnest:

"No doubt public justice takes a harsher view of these matters than I do. The organized community has ruthlessly to protect general morality and convention, and has therefore to condemn instead of to excuse. But I do not see why I, who am a private individual, should play the part of public prosecutor, and I prefer to be the defending counsel. I would rather understand people than judge them."

For a time Mrs. C. looked steadily at me. She hesitated before replying. I was beginning to be afraid that she had not fully understood me, and I was about to repeat in English the substance of what I had said in German. It was needless. With a serious mien, as if she had been an examiner and I a student, she resumed her questions.

"Don't you think it despicable, don't you think it odious, for a woman to leave her husband and her two children in order to cast in her lot with a chance-comer, when she cannot possibly know whether he is worthy of her love? Do you really find it possible to excuse such off-hand, such frivolous behaviour in a woman no longer in her first youth; in one who must have been led to cultivate self-respect, were it only for the sake of her children?"

But I stuck to my guns.

"I can only repeat that I hesitate to form an opinion, or to condemn, in this instance. To you, I am ready to admit that I have been overstating the case. Of course

poor Madame Henriette is not a heroine. I do not suppose that she was prompted by a fine love of adventure, and still less am I inclined to regard her as a '*grande amoureuse*.' From what I saw of her, she seemed to me nothing more than an average woman, and rather a weak one. I have a certain respect for her because she boldly followed the promptings of her will; but I am still more sorry for her, for to-morrow she will be extremely unhappy, if sorrow has not already visited her to-day. She may have acted foolishly, and certainly her decision was too hasty. But she has done nothing that is base or mean, and I continue to deny that any one is entitled to despise the poor woman."

"What about you?" asked Mrs. C. "Have you yourself as much respect for her, as much esteem, as you had before? Do you make no distinction between the woman with whom you were acquainted two days ago as an honoured wife, and the woman who fled yesterday with a stranger?"

"None. No distinction at all. Not the least in the world."

"Is that so?" Without noticing, she put her question in English, her keen interest in the matter having distracted her attention from the manner. After a brief pause for reflection, she once more looked at me inquiringly.

"Suppose you met Madame Henriette to-morrow, in Nice let us say, arm-in-arm with that young man. Would you be ready to take your hat off to her?"

"Of course!"

"Speak to her?"

"Of course!"

"If you were, . . . if you were married, would you introduce such a woman to your wife, just as if nothing had happened?"

"Certainly."

"Would you really?" she said, dropping into English once more, filled with astonishment and incredulity.

"Surely I would," I rejoined, also speaking English unawares.

Mrs. C. made no answer for a time. She seemed to be thinking hard. Then, suddenly, as if surprised at her own courage, and looking me once more straight in the face, she broke out with :

"I don't know if I would. Perhaps I might do it also."

Then, with that indescribable self-confidence peculiar to the English, which enables them without offence to break off a conversation when they have had enough of it, she stood up and offered me her hand in the most friendly way. Her intervention had restored peace, and we were all inwardly grateful that we, who had been on the verge of blows, were able to part company with reasonable courtesy, after relieving the tension of the atmosphere with a little banter.

Although our discussion had, after all, ended without an open breach, a certain estrangement persisted between myself and my adversaries. The German married couple were rather cold in their manner ; while the young Italians, during the next few days, made a point of asking me again and again whether I had had any news from "*cara signora Enrietta*." We preserved the forms of polite society, but the frank and simple sociability of our table had been irrevocably destroyed.

All the more remarkable, therefore, in contrast with the ironical and chilly demeanour of the others, was the peculiar friendliness shown towards me by Mrs. C. after the discussion I have recorded. Though in general she was a reserved woman, and was rarely disposed to talk to any of us except at meal times, she now seized several opportunities of conversing with me in the garden, thus

giving me what I might almost call a signal mark of her favour. Indeed, to be honest, I must say that she positively sought me out, and never missed a chance of talking to me. The impulse that moved her was so unmistakable that I might have flattered my vanity with foolish thoughts had she not been a woman well on in years. But whenever we met, the talk inevitably turned upon what had been the starting-point of our intimacy, upon Madame Henriette. Mrs. C., to all appearance, took a strange delight in accusing her of instability and untrustworthiness, of neglecting obvious duties. Nevertheless, the Englishwoman seemed also to delight in the steadfastness with which I continued to express my sympathy for the fugitive—a sympathy which nothing could induce me to repudiate. Again and again, Mrs. C. steered the conversation in this direction, so that I could not but wonder what underlay her amazing persistence.

Matters went on thus for several days, five or six perhaps, without my having been able to learn why the topic of our conversations was of moment to her. But its importance was manifest when, in the course of a stroll we had together, I told her that my stay was drawing to a close, and that I should be leaving in two days. Her face, usually impassive, became tense, and a shade passed across her grey eyes.

"What a pity! There is so much I have wanted to talk to you about."

From this moment, she seemed restless and unsettled, as if her thoughts were busied with something other than that of which she was speaking. At length her absence of mind became obvious even to herself, for after a sudden pause she gave me her hand in good-bye, saying:

"I find that I cannot express clearly what I want to say to you. I had better write to you."

Walking quicker than was her wont, she sought the house.

STORIES AND LEGENDS

That evening, before dinner, a letter in her strong, round hand was waiting for me in my room. Unfortunately in those days I was not always careful to keep letters, and I have torn up or mislaid this one. I cannot give the words but only the general tenor of her inquiry whether I would allow her to tell me something which had happened in her own life. The episode, she said, dated from so long back that she felt as though it might well have happened to some one else. The fact that I was to leave in two days would make it easier to talk to me of something which had been much in her thoughts for twenty years, and had at times been a torment to her. If such a conversation would not be a nuisance to me . . .

The letter fascinated me. Its plain English endowed it with a high degree of clarity and resoluteness. Yet I found it difficult to answer, and tore up three drafts before I penned words which satisfied me.

"I am greatly honoured by the confidence you repose in me, and can assure you of my willingness. Of course I do not ask you to tell me any more than you feel an inner need to tell. But whatever you do wish to say, you can, without hesitation, say frankly. Rest assured that I shall not be unworthy of your confidence."

This note found its way to her during the course of the evening, and next morning I received an answer.

"You are right. Half-truths are useless. Nothing is any good except the whole. I shall do my utmost to avoid reticence where frankness is needed. Come to my room after dinner. At my age (I am sixty-seven) I need not bother about the proprieties! I cannot say what I have to say in the garden, where other people are near. You will understand, when you have heard my tale, that it has not been easy for me to make up my mind to speak."

We met as usual at table, and talked of all things and sundry. But in the garden she avoided an encounter,

TWENTY-FOUR HOURS IN A WOMAN'S LIFE

with manifest confusion. I was distressed and touched by the way in which this white-haired woman flitted down a pine avenue to escape me, just as if she had been a shy girl.

In the evening, at the appointed hour, I knocked at her door, and was promptly admitted. The room was dimly lighted. A small reading-lamp on the table threw a yellow cone of radiance. Mrs. C. greeted me without embarrassment, waved me to an armchair, and sat down opposite me. I guessed that these movements had been rehearsed in imagination. Then came a pause, no less obviously unrehearsed; a pause that grew longer and longer. I did not venture to break the silence, for I knew the difficulty under which she was labouring, knew that a strong will was encountering strong resistance. From the lounge beneath, came the muffled sounds of a waltz, to which I listened attentively, since they made the silence in Mrs. C.'s room somewhat less oppressive. My hostess, too, seemed to find the tension of this silence painful, for she suddenly ceased to shiver on the brink, and plunged into the water.

"My only difficulty is how to begin. For two days I have been considering the necessity for being clear and truthful, and I hope I shall succeed. You are perhaps still wondering why I want to tell you all this, you who are a stranger. But there is hardly a day, hardly an hour, when I do not ponder what I am about to relate. I am an old woman now, and I can assure you that it is intolerable to have one's thoughts for ever fixed upon one incident, one day in a lifetime. For everything I have to recount happened in one brief span of four-and-twenty hours out of my sixty-seven years, so that again and again I have reasoned with myself, saying with wearisome iteration that it is of little moment to have acted foolishly for so short a time. That does not help me to free myself

from the pricks of what we vaguely term conscience. The other day, when I heard you speak as you did about Madame Henriette, it occurred to me that my useless broodings, my interminable self-accusations, might come to an end if I could make up my mind to talk freely to some one about this one day in my life. Had I been a Roman Catholic instead of a member of the Church of England, I should long since have relieved my mind at the confessional. But this resource is not open to those of our persuasion, and that is why I have come to so strange a decision, why I am going to gain absolution by making my confession to you. I know that I am doing a very strange thing, but you were good enough to accede to my wish without hesitation, and I am grateful.

"As I have already said, I am concerned only to tell you about one day in my life. In comparison with this day, all the other days seem unmeaning, and their story would bore you. Until I was forty-two, I never did anything out of the common. My parents were Scottish landowners, well-to-do folk, possessing factories and farms. After the manner of people in our station, we spent most of the year at our country seats, and went to London for the season. When I was eighteen, I made the acquaintance of the man who was to become my husband. He was the second son of a noted family, an army man who had spent ten years in India. We married after a brief engagement, and lived an easy-going life: three months in London, three months in the country, the rest of the year at comfortable hotels in Italy, Spain, or France. No shadow came to trouble our marriage. I had two sons, who are now approaching middle age. When I was forty-two, my husband died suddenly, from liver disease, a sequel of the years he had spent in the tropics. I lost him after two terrible weeks. The elder of my sons was in the army, and the younger one at college. Thus I was left absolutely alone, and this solitude was torture to me,

used as I was to loving companionship. I could not bear to stay in the empty house, where everything reminded me of my loss, and I therefore made up my mind to spend the next few years abroad, until my sons married.

"Thenceforward, my life was meaningless and futile. The man with whom I had shared every hour and every thought for three-and-twenty years was dead. My children did not need me, and I was afraid of overshadowing their youth with my grief. For myself, I had no further desires. My first move was to Paris, where I bored myself with sight-seeing. Inanimate things did not interest me; and as for people, I found their company trying, for their polite sympathy at sight of my widow's weeds was intolerable to me. I can hardly tell you how I passed these first weary months of wandering. I only know that I longed for death, but lacked energy to quicken its coming.

"In the second year of my widowhood and the forty-fourth of my life, this flight from an existence which had become valueless but which I did not know how to escape, brought me towards the end of March to Monte Carlo. No doubt boredom directed my footsteps. I was suffering from that sense of vacancy in which the most trifling external stimuli may bring distraction. The less stir there was in my inner self, the more did I feel drawn to places where the whirl of life was swift. For one who is having no personal experience, the passionate disquiet of others is at any rate a titillation of the nerves, like seeing a play or listening to music.

"I often went, therefore, to the Casino. I liked to watch the waves of joy or despair flit across the faces of others, what time my own mind remained so horribly inert. Besides, my husband, though no gambler, had been fond of whiling away an hour in this place from time to time, and I was making a sort of cult of reviving all our joint experiences. Thus began the four-and-

twenty hours which were far more exciting than any plunge at the gaming table.

"I had lunched with my relative the Duchess of M. After dinner I did not feel tired enough to go to bed. Instead, I went to the Casino, wandered up and down between the tables, and watched the gamesters in a peculiar fashion. Explicitly I say 'in a peculiar fashion,' one I had learned from my husband. This was when, weary of looking on, I had complained of the tedium of perpetually watching the same faces: the wrinkled old women who will sit for hours before they venture to stake a trifle; the professional gamblers and cocottes; the enigmatic and strangely compacted company which, as you know, is far less picturesque and romantic than novelists would have us believe, the novelists who tell us that the '*fleur d'élégance*' and the aristocracy of Europe assemble at Monte Carlo. Besides, this was the Casino of long ago, when there was plenty of money on the tables: rustling notes, golden napoleons, fat five-franc pieces—far more attractive than the modern gaming-house, fashionably rebuilt, where Cook's tourists tediously fritter away their insipid counters. But even in those days I was bored by the sameness of it all, until my husband, who had a passion for chiromancy, drew my attention to the possibility of a peculiar method of observation, which was certainly far more interesting, far more exciting, than idle contemplation of the spectacle. 'Don't bother about the faces,' he said. 'Look at the table; watch the players' hands; study the behaviour of their hands.'

"I wonder whether you yourself have ever concentrated your gaze on the table in this way, looking only at the green square of cloth, in the middle of which the ball is whirling from figure to figure as if drunk, while in the quadrangle notes and gold and silver coins are scattered like seed, which the croupier rakes in from the loser or shovels out to the winner. In such a view, the only things

that really change are the hands—the pale, quickly moving or motionless hands round the green table; each one of them peeping forth from a cavern-like sleeve; each one of them a beast of prey crouching for the spring; all of them differently shaped and tinted; some of them bare, some of them decked with rings and clinking bracelets; some of them hairy like wild beasts, some of them damp and writhing like eels; all of them tense, pulsing with impatience. As I watch them I cannot but think of a race-course, where the horses waiting for the signal are reined in with difficulty lest they should make a false start; they tremble, rear, and prance in just the same fashion.

“All kinds of things can be inferred from these hands, from their attitude in repose and from the way in which they grasp the money or the counters. A clawlike hand betokens avarice; a loose hand, extravagance; a quiet one, calculation; a tremulous one, despair. A hundred characteristics are suddenly betrayed by the gesture with which the winnings are seized. One person will nervously crumple up the notes; another, overcome with lassitude, will leave everything where it lies while the ball starts on a new round. The gambler betrays himself in various ways. He has to say but a dozen words, and I know what he is; but his hands betray him even more effectually. For almost all gamblers learn to control their faces, wearing a mask of imperturbability, setting their features in a fixed expression, retaining their excitement within their clenched teeth, keeping the sparkle of excitement out of their eyes, assuming a pose of indifference. But, for the very reason that their attention is thus concentrated upon facial expression, they are apt to forget their hands, to forget that some are present who watch these hands, reading there everything which the forced smile and the impassive countenance are designed to conceal. The hand blabs secrets shamelessly. A moment inevit-

ably comes when these laboriously controlled, apparently slumbering fingers, throw off their well-bred indifference in the tense instant when the roulette ball settles down into its little hollow and the winning number is proclaimed; then it is that these hundred or five hundred hands involuntarily make a movement which is the purely individual expression of primitive instinct. One who has learned, as I had learned under the guidance of my husband's hobby, to watch the arena of hands, finds the unexpected outbreak of temperament, varying from person to person, more interesting than any theatrical or musical performance. I cannot tell you how many thousand varieties of hands there are: wild beasts with hairy, crooked fingers, seizing the money as a spider seizes a fly; nervous and tremulous fingers, with pallid nails, scarcely venturing to grasp what has been won; noble and base, violent and timid, crafty and faltering; differing from person to person, each pair of hands giving expression to one particular life. The four or five pairs belonging to the croupiers can alone be excepted, for they are pure automata, doing their work with circumstantial, business-like, and utterly noncommittal precision, so that in contrast with the passionate liveliness of the gamblers' hands they seem as mechanical as a calculating machine. Yet in their very self-control, these hands of the croupiers produce a remarkable impression; they contrast so powerfully with their questing and passionate brethren. They are ranged in uniform, so to speak, like policemen in the midst of an agitated crowd.

"An additional charm in this method of observation is derived from the fact that after a few days the observer becomes personally acquainted with the habits and passions of particular hands. I myself got to know some of them intimately, feeling friendly or hostile as the case might be. Many of them were so repulsive in their greed that I would turn away from them when I caught sight

of them, as if I had become the chance witness of some impropriety. But every new hand on the table was a stimulating experience, and an object for curious inquiry. Often I was so much interested that I forgot to look at the face to which it belonged, the face that rose imperturbably above a stiff-fronted shirt or a white bosom.

"One evening I entered the Casino, and made my way, past two crowded tables, to a third where there was still room. I was getting out some gold pieces for my own stake, during that pause in the game, that period of ominous silence, when the ball, wearied almost to death, is staggering from one number to the next. At this moment I heard a strange crackling noise. Looking to see whence it came, I was astonished, nay alarmed, to perceive two hands that were strange to me, a right and a left, grappling with one another like furious animals, seizing one another so convulsively that the finger-joints were cracking like nut-shells. These hands were singularly beautiful; long, slender, and yet tense with muscle; extremely white, with well-shaped, pearly nails. I watched them throughout the evening, these extraordinarily distinctive hands. What especially moved me was the passion they exhaled, and the convulsive way in which they gripped one another. They were the hands of some one (I realized this in a flash) who was forcing all the strength of his feelings into his finger-tips, lest their violence tear him to pieces. But at the moment when, with a dry sound, the ball fell into its socket, and the croupier called out the winning number, of a sudden the two hands fell apart like two animals hit by the same shot. They fell dead, as it were, and not merely exhausted. They showed a lassitude and a disillusionment, a sense that everything was at an end, which I feel it almost impossible to describe. Never before or since have I seen such expressive hands, hands whose every muscle

was a mouth, whose every emotion exuded palpably through the pores. For a moment they lay on the green table like jellyfish cast up on the seashore, flat and dead. Then, one of them, the right, began laboriously to move at the finger-tips. It trembled, drew back, rotated on its axis, rocked, circled, and at length nervously grasped a counter, which it rolled irresolutely like a little wheel between thumb and forefinger. Then, suddenly arching like a cat about to spring, it positively spewed the hundred-franc counter into the middle of the black field. Thereupon, as if a signal had been given, the left hand, which had hitherto been inactive, became a prey to excitement likewise. It crept towards its trembling brother, now exhausted by placing the stake; then the two hands lay shuddering side by side, the wrists beating noiselessly on the table, as the teeth chatter gently in the cold fit of a fever. Never, I repeat, had I seen such expressive hands, manifesting such spasmodic excitement and tension. Everything else in this vaulted room—the murmur of conversation, the calling of the croupiers, the to-and-fro movement of men and women, the circling of the ball which had again been launched upon its course—all this multiplicity of confusing impressions, now seemed to me lifeless when contrasted with these trembling, breathing, panting, expectant, freezing, shuddering, wellnigh incredible hands, at which, as if under a spell, I was forced to stare.

“At last, however, I could no longer refrain from looking at the face which belonged to these wonderful hands. I was anxious, exceedingly anxious, when I did this, for I was afraid of the hands! Slowly my gaze travelled up the arms, past the narrow shoulders, and reached the face. Once more I was seized with alarm, for the face spoke the same unrestrained, the same fantastic and extravagant language as the hands; like them, it was a terrible blend of moroseness with delicate, almost femi-

nine, beauty. Such a face! Isolated there, detached from its surroundings, I had ample time to study it as if it were an eyeless mask. There were eyes, of course; but they stared straight forward, not turning for a moment either to right or to left. The pupils looked like black glass balls between the widely opened lids; they mirrored, as it were, that other mahogany-coloured globe which was wantonly spinning round the roulette table. Never, never in my life had I seen so tense a visage, one that exercised such a strange fascination. The man to whom it belonged was about four-and-twenty years of age. Like the hands, the face was rather that of a passionate boy, full of pranks, than of a grown man. All these details came under my notice later. For the nonce, the face was monopolized by an expression of greed and frenzy. The small mouth, being half open, gave a glimpse of the teeth. From where I was, ten paces away, I could see that they were tightly clenched, and that the parted lips were rigid. A lock of fair hair had fallen across the damp forehead. The nostrils were working with excitement, as if little waves were pulsating beneath the skin. The head was thrust forward, still further forward even as I watched, so that it seemed to me as if it were on the point of being involved in the whirling of the little ball. Now I understood why the hands were so convulsively pressed together. Only by such a convulsive effort could the balance of the whole body be retained.

"Yet again I must say that never before had I seen a human face in which passion was revealed with such animal frankness, such shameless nudity. I myself was no less enthralled by its aspect than the face itself was enthralled by the leaps and bounds of the circling ball. Thenceforward I paid no heed to anything else in the hall; the surroundings seemed to me dull, vague, and obscure in comparison with the ardour of this countenance. For a long while, an hour perhaps, I watched

the man and his every gesture; watched the sparkle in his eyes, the tremulous and almost frantic movement of his hands, when the croupier shovelled out twenty gold pieces for their greedy grasp. When this happened, the face lighted up and looked quite young; the lines in it were smoothed away; the eyes shone; the body, which had been bent forward, straightened. Now my gamester sat easily in his chair, sustained by a sense of triumph; his fingers toyed affectionately with the coins, chinked them one against the other, danced them up and down. Then he restlessly turned his eyes back towards the green table; looked at it like a young hound which, with dilated nostrils, is eagerly snuffing a scent; and, with a quick movement, staked the whole pile of gold pieces on one of the squares. The tense watching was resumed. Again the lips twitched; again the hands were convulsively clasped; the boyish expression of countenance disappeared, to be replaced by a look of lustful expectation—till the tension lapsed into disappointment. Now the face grew pale and elderly; the fire in the eyes was quenched; and these changes took place in a twinkling, when the ball settled down upon the wrong number. He had lost. For a second or two he stared fixedly as if he had not understood. Then, at the strident call of the croupier, the fingers pushed forward two or three gold pieces. But he was no longer self-confident. First he staked his coins in one place; then, changing his mind, in another; finally, when the ball was already rolling, with tremulous hand and following a sudden impulse, he placed two crumpled notes in the same square as before.

“The quivering alternation of loss and gain went on for about an hour, during which my eyes were fixed on this face with its ebb and flow of passions; or upon the hands, those wonderful hands, whose movements reflected the whole gamut of emotion. Never, even in the theatre, have I gazed with such rapt attention at the

face of an actor, as I now looked at this countenance across which the alternations of passion flitted incessantly like light and shade across an April landscape. Never had I shared so intimately in any game in which I myself had been a player, as I shared now in the reflexion of this stranger's excitement. Had any one been observing me at the time, he would have fancied me in a hypnotic trance. In very truth my absorption resembled hypnosis. I could not wrest my eyes away from this dumb show. Everything else in the room—the lights, the laughter, the glances—was for me but a formless haze, out of which the face flamed forth. I heard nothing, saw nothing, did not notice the people who passed by, paid no attention to the other hands extended like tentacles to clutch their winnings. I did not see the whirling ball, or heed the voice of the croupier. All that happened seemed nothing more than a dream, perceived as a magnified image in the concave mirror of these hands. I did not need to look at the ball in order to learn whether it settled down on red or on black. Every phase of loss or gain, expectation or disappointment, was instantly mirrored in the fleeting passions of this face.

“Then came a terrible moment, one which I had been dimly anticipating, one which had hung over my tense nerves like a threatening storm, and now suddenly burst upon them. Once more the ball was rattling round its course; once more the hundred players were holding their breath in suspense. The voice of the croupier, calling ‘Zero,’ broke through the silence, and, with his rake, he promptly gathered in all the clinking coins and rustling notes. At this instant, the convulsive hands made a peculiarly terrible movement, leaping up together as if to seize something which was not there, and then falling back on the table by their own weight as if utterly exhausted. Coming to life once more, they moved quickly back from the table to the body of their owner, scamb-

ling like wildcats up and down, to right and to left, feeling in one pocket after another on the chance that a coin might have been overlooked. The search was fruitless, but was renewed, while the ball was spinning once again, and the other gamblers were clinking their money, moving in their chairs, and filling the room with the murmur of manifold noises. I trembled as I watched, so keen was my sympathy. The fingers, still desperately hunting for money in pocket after pocket, might have been my own! Now the man sprang to his feet, like one who rises when suddenly taken ill, and feels that he will choke if he remains sitting. His chair, overturned, crashed on the floor. Regardless of his neighbours (who drew back in consternation), he tottered, and groped his way from the table.

"I felt as if I had been turned to stone. I understood whither he was going; he was going to his death. One who stood up with such a gesture, had it not in mind to seek a hotel, a drinking booth, a woman, a railway carriage, or any form of life, but was about to hurl himself into the unknown. Even the most callous among those present in this hell must have realized that the man had nothing more to depend upon at home or in his bank or among relatives, but had been staking his last coins, and therefore his very life, and was now stumbling away to find an exit from that life. From the outset I had feared, had felt convinced, that something more was being hazarded than ordinary losses and gains; yet it came as a shock to me when I saw the life ooze out of his eyes, and death's visage peep forth from the face of one who still drew breath. Unwittingly mimicking the gestures I had been watching, I clasped my hands convulsively together while he staggered away; and the disorder of his movements affected me no less powerfully than the previous tension had done. Something irresistible drew me after him; my feet seemed to move without

the instigation of my will. Thus, unconsciously as it were, and not of my own volition, I followed him through the door.

"He was at the window of the cloak-room, and the attendant had brought him his overcoat. His arms no longer obeyed him, and the servant had to help him on with his coat as sedulously as if he had been paralysed. Mechanically, he put his fingers into his waistcoat pocket, wishing to give the man a tip; but he found nothing there. This made him realize the situation anew. Stammering a word of apology, he gave a fresh impetus to his limbs, and reeled down the steps of the Casino like a drunken man, the attendant watching him from the top, contemptuously at first, and then with a knowledgeable smile.

"The ruined gambler's gestures were so pitiful that I was ashamed of myself for spying upon them. I hesitated, vexed with myself for having pried into a stranger's despair as nonchalantly as if he had been an actor on the stage. Then, in spite of myself, anxiety drove me once more into ill-considered action. Quickly getting my own cloak, with no clear thought of what I was doing, mechanically and impulsively I hastened through the darkness in pursuit of the stranger."

Mrs. C. broke off her story for a moment. Sitting opposite me, motionless, she had spoken uninterruptedly with the calm circumstantiality that was natural to her, after the manner of those who have prepared their words beforehand and have mentally rehearsed everything they intend to say. Now she paused for the first time, and then, after a brief interval, addressed me directly instead of continuing her narrative.

"I have promised you and myself," she began rather uneasily, "to tell you all the facts with absolute frankness. But I must ask you to believe in my frankness, and not

to ascribe my actions to hidden motives, which I might have no reason to be ashamed of had they existed, but whose existence it would be an error to assume. Let me insist, then, that when I followed this ruined gambler into the street I was not in love with him. I never thought of him as a man. I was over forty when my husband died, and thenceforward I was quite indifferent to men as men. That sort of thing was over for me once and for all. I tell you this in plain terms, and must do so, for otherwise you would not understand the full horror of what was now to happen. I should, indeed, find it difficult to explain the exact nature of the feeling which forced me to follow that poor wretch. Curiosity was doubtless one element; but a much more important ingredient was anxiety, a dread of something horrible which, from the first glimpse, had seemed to me to surround the young man like an aura. Such feelings, however, cannot be analysed. They are too coercive for that, arise too quickly and spontaneously. I suppose that my chief urge was an instinctive desire to help, which prompts us to snatch a child out of the path of a motor car. You know how people who cannot swim will jump from a bridge in order to save a drowning person? An overwhelming impulse animates them, and they are in the water before they have time to reflect, before they can realize the folly of what they are doing. Thus, without thinking, without conscious deliberation, I followed the unhappy man from the gambling hall to the exit and from the exit to the terrace.

"Moreover, I am certain that neither you nor anyone else with awakened sensibilities could have escaped the influence of this eager curiosity, for nothing could have been more distressing to witness than so young a man, four-and-twenty at most, his body slack like that of a dotard, his gait unco-ordinated like that of a drunkard, moving heavily down the steps to the terrace. He col-

lapsed on to a bench, as if he had been a sack carelessly thrown there. I shuddered as I looked at him, for I realized that he was in truth at the end of his tether. His posture as he sat was almost that of a corpse, that of one in whose muscles no life remains. His head lolled obliquely over the back of the seat, his arms hung limply, and in the half-light of the flickering lamps any passer-by would have believed that he had shot himself. When the vision of how he might look to another rose before me, and when I myself contemplated him as a man who had shot himself, the conviction forced itself on my mind that he had a revolver in his pocket—that to-morrow, on this bench or a similar one, he would be found lifeless and bloodstained. For he had dropped on to the seat like a stone flung into an abyss, which does not pause in its movement till it has reached the bottom of the gulf. Never have I seen such weariness and despair expressed in bodily pose.

“Now you must realize my own position. I was standing twenty or thirty paces behind the bench, behind the man who sat there in a state of collapse, at my wits’ end, driven forward by an inner urge to help, but held back by an inborn and inbred shyness which made it almost impossible for me to address a stranger in the street. The gas-lights shone unsteadily. The skies were overcast. There was hardly anyone about, for it was close on midnight, and I was practically alone in the park with this man bent on suicide. Five times, perhaps ten times, I had pulled myself together and had been on the point of going up to him; but always I had been prevented by shame, or perhaps by an instinct which told me that a drowning man is apt to drag a would-be saviour down to destruction—and amid the conflict I was very much aware of the ludicrous features in my situation. Withal, I could neither speak to him nor make up my mind to leave him. You must believe me when I tell you that

STORIES AND LEGENDS

I waited like this for an hour, an interminable hour, while thousands upon thousands of time's ripples broke unheard on the shores of the terrace.

"I could not find courage to speak or to act. I might have waited there half the night; or might in the end have followed the selfish dictates of prudence, and gone home. I think, indeed, I had already made up my mind to leave this bundle of misery alone in its weakness, when something happened which got the better of my irresolution. It began to rain! All the evening, the wind had been blowing cloud-wraiths landward from the sea, and I had felt that the air was surcharged with moisture. Now, of a sudden, drops fell, and soon the wind-driven clouds were breaking into heavy, drenching rain. I took shelter beneath the overhanging roof of a kiosk; but, as the front was open, the squalls of driving rain beat in on me and wetted my dress. Indeed, there was such a downpour, and the wind was so fierce, that the water splashed up from the ground, and the chill spray rose to my very face.

"Nevertheless—and the sight was so poignant that to recall it after twenty years still brings a lump to my throat—in this cloud-burst the unhappy wretch sat motionless on the bench. The water was gurgling in every gutter and dripping from the eaves; the fury of the elements had driven every one else under shelter. Yet there before me on the bench, the dark heap of humanity remained motionless. I have told you how, in the Casino, the man had seemed to me instinct with a magical energy, so that all his feelings were plastically embodied in his movements, in his gestures. Now, nothing on earth could have portrayed despair, self-abandonment, death-in-life, so gripingly as did he who sat thus unmoved, unfeeling, in the torrential rain, too weary to take the few steps that separated him from my shelter, utterly indifferent to his own existence. No sculptor, no

TWENTY-FOUR HOURS IN A WOMAN'S LIFE

poet, not even a Michelangelo or a Dante, ever succeeded in making the last extremity of misery and despair so visible and palpable as did this living man who allowed the elements to rage around him without having the energy to make a movement that might have protected him from their fury.

"The sight overcame my self-control. With one spring, I ran the gauntlet of the rain, seized and shook the drenched bundle on the seat.

"'Come along,' I said, grasping his arm.

"Something stared sluggishly up at me. He tried to make a movement, but did not understand.

"'Come along!' I repeated, almost angrily now, tightening my grip on his wet sleeve.

"He rose slowly to his feet, and stood irresolute.

"'What do you want?' he asked; and I had no answer ready, for I did not know what to do with him. My one thought was to get him out of the cold downpour, to put an end to the mad and desperate inertia of the would-be suicide. I did not release his arm, but drew him towards the kiosk, where there was at any rate a pent roof to give a little protection from wind and water. To get him into comparative dryness—beyond this, I had no purpose in mind.

"There we stood side by side in the narrow space, sheltered to some extent, but still wetted by the driving rain and the splashings from the ground. The position was intolerable. I could not stand there any longer beside this drenched stranger. Yet I could not leave him without a word in his extremity, now that I had taken charge of him as it were by bringing him from the bench. Something must be done. Gradually a clear intention began to take shape in my mind. 'The best will be,' I thought, 'to drive him home, and then seek my own quarters. By to-morrow he will be able to look after himself once more.' Consequently, as he continued to

stand motionless beside me, staring out into the storm, I said:

“Where do you live?”

“I don't live anywhere. I came here this evening from Nice. I have nowhere to take you.”

“I did not fully understand him. Only by degrees did I come to realize that he took me for a prostitute, for one of the street-walkers who prowl round the Casino after nightfall, in the hope of getting money from a successful gambler, or from someone who has had too much to drink. After all, what else could he think? Even now, as I tell you the story, I am, for the first time, coming to realize the full significance of my position. What else could he think of me? No lady could have been expected to seize his arm as I had done, and drag him away from his bench. But this thought did not enter my head immediately. Not until later, not until too late, did I come to understand his ghastly misconception regarding me. For, if I had understood, I should never have gone on to say what I did, have gone on to utter words which could only confirm him in his error. What I said was:

“Well, take a room in some hotel. You can't stay here. You must put up somewhere for the night.”

“Now, his distressing misconception became plain to me, for, without turning to look at me, he simply refused, rather scornfully refused, what he regarded as my overtures.

“‘No, I don't want a room, or anything else in the world. Don't bother about me, my dear; there is nothing to be made out of me. You are barking up the wrong tree; I have no money.’

“This was said with such overwhelming indifference, and I was so profoundly moved by the sight of his utter exhaustion and his drenched condition, that it was impossible for me to be so petty or so stupid as to take offence. All I could feel was what I had felt when I first

saw him staggering away from the Casino, and what I had been feeling throughout this incredible hour—that I had to do with a man, young and alive, but in imminent danger of death; and that I must save him. I drew yet nearer to him.

“‘Don’t bother about money. Just come with me! You can’t stay here; you’ll catch your death of cold if you do. Don’t bother about anything, but come along with me!’

“He turned his head; and I realized how, even amid the rain and the darkness, he was trying for the first time to look at my face. His body, too, seemed slowly awakening from its lethargy.

“‘As you will,’ he said, giving way at last. ‘It’s all the same to me. . . . Well, why not? Let us go.’

“I put up my umbrella, and he took my arm. This sudden approach to intimacy was disagreeable to me, disgusted me. In fact, I was horrified. I had not the courage to deny him; for if I were to draw back now, I should thrust him into the abyss once more, and everything I had hitherto done would be fruitless.

“We walked towards the Casino. Now, it suddenly occurred to me that I did not know what I was going to do with him. The best thing, I thought, would be to drive him to a hotel, and to put some money in his hand when we got there, so that he could have a night’s lodging and travel home in the morning. At this moment a cab drove past, and I hailed it. The cabman asked me ‘Where to?’ I did not know what to answer! Then I remembered that the man beside me, dripping wet as he was, would never be admitted to one of the good hotels. Consequently, being inexperienced in such matters and taking no thought as to what was implied in my words, I said to the cabman:

“‘Any inexpensive hotel you may know of.’

“The cabman, imperturbable in spite of the rain,

whipped up his horses. The stranger said nothing. The wheels rattled, and the rain pattered unceasingly on the window panes. In the dark, coffin-like box where we were sitting, I felt as if I were driving beside a corpse. I wanted to say something, to find words which might mitigate the strangeness, the horror, of this dumb companionship; but I could think of nothing. After a few minutes, the cab stopped. I got out first, and paid the driver, who banged the door of the cab, climbed back on to the box, and drove away. We were left in front of a small hotel. A porch with a glass roof protected us from the rain, which was still pouring down.

"The stranger, in his exhaustion, was leaning against the wall, the wet still dripping from his hat and his crumpled clothing. He might have been a man who had tried to drown himself, and had been rescued from the river before he had lost his senses. Runnels of water showed on the wall against which he was leaning. But he made no movement to wring the excess of moisture from his clothes, or to take off his hat from which drops continued to trickle on to his face. He stood unmoved, and I can hardly convey to you how pitiful this inertia seemed to me.

"Well, I had to do something. I took some money from my pocket.

" 'There are a hundred francs. Engage a room for yourself, and take the train back to Nice to-morrow.'

"He looked at me in astonishment. I went on:

" 'I was watching you in the Casino. I knew that you had lost all your money, and was afraid that you would do something rash. There is no disgrace in being helped. Take it, please.'

"But he pushed back my hand with an energy which I had not suspected him of possessing.

" 'You're a good soul,' he said; 'but don't waste your money on me. There is no help for me. It doesn't matter

in the least whether I go to sleep to-night or not. To-morrow, in any case, spells "finish" for me.'

" 'Please take it,' I urged. 'To-morrow you will think better of things. Sleep upon your decision. By daylight, the whole affair will look different.'

"But when I pressed the money on him once more, he pushed my hand away again, almost roughly this time.

" 'Drop it,' he said wearily. 'No use! I'd much better do what I have to do in the open, and not make these good people's room in a mess with blood. A hundred francs won't help me out of my difficulty, or a thousand either. I should only go to-morrow to the tables with anything left over, and gamble it all away. What's the good of beginning afresh? I've had enough of it.'

"This dull and heavy tone pierced me to the soul. He stood there close to me, young, handsome, full of life; and I knew that unless I did my utmost, within a couple of hours he would be a dead man. My pride was up in arms. Zealously, nay angrily, I determined to overcome his resistance. I seized him by the shoulder.

" 'Enough of this nonsense! You must engage a room here, and early to-morrow morning I will come and see you into the train. You must get away from this place. You must go home to-morrow, and I shall not be satisfied until I see you in the train with your ticket in your hand. A young man must not throw his life away because he has lost a few hundred or a few thousand francs. That would be cowardice, a hysterical outburst of anger and bitterness. To-morrow you will agree that I am right.'

" 'To-morrow!' he repeated sarcastically. 'To-morrow! If you only knew where I shall be to-morrow! I wish I knew—for I must own to a little curiosity about the matter. No, no! Go away home, my dear. Don't bother, and don't waste your money.'

"But I would not yield. I had by now become obsessed with the idea of saving him. I forced his hand open, and pressed the note into it.

" 'You'll just take the money and go to your room!' and thereupon I rang the bell resolutely. 'The porter will come in a moment, and you will go upstairs to bed. I shall come back at nine in the morning, and take you to the station. Be easy in your mind. I shall see to it that you get home all right. What you have to do now is go to bed, sleep, and forget your thoughts.'

"As I finished speaking, the key grated in the lock, and the door opened.

" 'Come!' said the young man suddenly, in a harsh, firm, and embittered tone. His fingers closed round my wrist in a grip of steel. I was terrified, utterly terrified; was paralysed; almost lost consciousness . . . I wanted to defend myself, to tear myself away; but my will was in abeyance. I . . . I . . . I think you will understand. I . . . I was ashamed to struggle with this stranger in the presence of the porter, who stood waiting impatiently. Next moment, I was inside the hotel. I wanted to speak but the words stuck in my throat. The hand stilled gripped my wrist. I had a vague sense of going upstairs . . . I heard the key turn in the door.

"Suddenly I was alone there with the stranger, in a strange room, in a hotel whose name I have never learned even to this day."

Mrs. C. stopped speaking, and rose to her feet. She seemed unable to say any more. Going to the window, she stood there in silence for several minutes, looking out, or perhaps only leaning her forehead against the cold pane of glass. I had not the courage to look at her closely, for I did not wish to spy on the old lady in her distress. I sat where I was, without asking a question,

without making a sound, and waited till, with renewed self-command, she came back and sat down opposite me once more.

"Well, I have turned the most difficult corner. I hope you will believe me when I tell you again, when I swear by all I hold sacred, swear by my honour and my children, that never down to that moment had there entered my mind the remotest thought of an intimate union with the stranger; that without any movement of my conscious will, quite without realization of what was happening, I had, as it were, fallen through a trapdoor out of the smooth course of my existence into this extraordinary situation. I have pledged myself to be truthful to you and to myself, and with that pledge in my mind, I assure you once more that I had been animated solely by an almost extravagant longing to help, and not by any personal feeling whatsoever; that without desire, without warning, I had become involved in this tragical adventure.

"You will not ask me to tell you what took place in that room, what happened on that memorable night—though I myself have never forgotten and shall never be able to forget. That night, I was wrestling with a man for his life. It was plain to me that this stranger was like a drowning man clinging to a straw. Mine was the only, the frail support which sustained him, which prevented his sinking into the depths. I summoned all my forces in the hope of saving him. Among millions of persons, one only has such an experience, and even to that individual the experience will come once only in a lifetime. For my part, had it not been for this chance happening, I could not have dreamed with what desperate, with what uncontrollable longing, a human being clings to the red drops of life. Sheltered as I had been from the elemental powers of existence, I had never learned with what consummate art, with what marvellous ingenuity, nature

STORIES AND LEGENDS

will sometimes compress into the space of a few breaths, heat and cold, death and life, joy and despair. This night was so crowded with struggle and conversation, with passion and anger and hatred, with imploring and frenzied tears, that it seemed to me to last a thousand years, and I fancied that we—one of whom had entered the abyss animated by a mad craving for death; the other all unsuspecting—emerged from the death-struggle utterly transformed, with different senses and different feelings.

“But I will not dwell on this. I cannot and will not describe it. What I must tell you about is my awakening in the morning. I awoke from a heavy sleep, from the depths of a night such as I had never known before. It was a good while before I could open my eyes. Then, the first thing I saw was an unfamiliar ceiling. My eyes passed to the walls and furniture of an unknown and sordid room. I could not remember how I had found my way into it. At first I tried to persuade myself that I was still dreaming. An exceptionally clear, unusually vivid dream, no doubt! Still, it must be a dream, which had persisted into my waking from that profound and confused slumber. Yet how could it be a dream? Sunlight, unmistakably real sunlight, was streaming in through the window. From beneath rose the bustle of the street, the noise of trams, human voices. Then I knew that this was no dream. I was awake. Involuntarily I sat up, in the hope of pulling my thoughts together. Then, as I turned my eyes sideways, I saw (how can I make you feel all my horror?) a strange man sleeping beside me in the wide bed—a stranger, a half-naked and unknown man.

“The appalling situation overcame me, so that I sank back almost fainting. But this was not a kindly loss of consciousness. Far from it, for in an instant all that had happened flashed back into my mind, and I had but one

wish—to die of the loathing and the shame that overwhelmed me at finding myself in bed with a stranger, and doubtless in some unsavoury haunt. My heart almost stopped beating, and I held my breath, as if thereby I could annul the dreadful consciousness of my position.

“I cannot tell how long I lay there, with an icy chill pervading my limbs. The dead in their coffins must lie in such a fashion. I only know that I closed my eyes, praying to God, to any heavenly power, to show me that after all it was no more than an evil dream. But my sharpened senses made it impossible for me to deceive myself. I heard voices in the next room, the pouring out of water, footsteps in the passage; evidence piled on evidence to convince me that I was awake.

“I do not remember how long this dreadful condition lasted. Such seconds have other measures than those of ordinary life. Suddenly I was overcome by a fresh and more terrible anxiety. This stranger, whose very name was unknown to me, might wake and speak to me. Instantly I realized that I had only one resource left. I must dress and escape before he awoke. The great thing was that he should not see me again, that I should not have to talk to him again. Instant escape! Back to my own life, my own hotel; take the first train that would carry me from this accursed spot, from this country, never to revisit it. To have no witnesses, no accusers, no—accomplices.

“The thought restored my energies. Inch by inch, cautiously, and with the stealthy movements of a thief, I slipped out of bed. With the same furtive caution, I dressed, trembling the while lest he should wake. Now I was ready. I had only to fetch my hat from the foot of the bed. I tiptoed towards it, but as I did so I could not resist the impulse to take one last glance at the face of the stranger who had dropped into my life like a bolt

from the blue. One glance, no more! But how extraordinary! The young man who lay sleeping there was in very truth a stranger. I found it difficult to recognize in him the man I had seen overnight. The convulsed features of passion had vanished. This was a boy's face, radiating purity and serenity. Yesterday, the lips had been compressed, and often had been held, as in a vice, between the clenched teeth; now they were soft and full and were parted in a half-smile. His fair hair fell across his smooth forehead; he was breathing quietly, resting peacefully.

"You will remember what I told you of his appearance before—that never in anyone had I seen so monstrous an expression of criminal greed as in the stranger at the gaming table. But as I gazed at him now I felt that, even in a child, who will often look perfectly angelic when asleep, I had never seen such an aspect of pure delight, of truly blessed slumber. His features, to all seeming, bore witness to a paradisaical release from internal tension; to a sense of deliverance, of rescue. At sight of him, anxiety, horror, melted away like a heavy, black cloud. I was no longer ashamed; I was almost happy. That which had been so terrible, so incomprehensible, had suddenly acquired a meaning for me. I rejoiced, I was proud, to think that, thanks to my self-sacrifice, this young, tender, and lovely stripling, who lay as still and serene as a flower, was not lying lifeless, with staring eyes and shattered skull. He was saved, and I was his saviour. I now contemplated the sleeper with what I can only call a maternal feeling, for through me he had been born back into life by an act of birth which had been more painful than the birth of my own children. In this shabby and sordid room, in this noisome house of accommodation, I felt (you will smile at my words) as if I were in a church; I had an eerie and wondrous sense of happiness and sacredness. The most

horrible moment of a lifetime had been followed by a sister-moment which was full of sublimity.

"Had I unwittingly made a sound? Had I involuntarily said something? I do not know. The sleeper opened his eyes, and I drew back in alarm. He looked about in bewilderment. Just like myself when I woke, he seemed, with effort, to be climbing out of an abyss of confusion. His gaze flitted over the walls and furnishings, and then his eyes lighted on me. Before he could speak, I had decided on my course of action. I would not let him utter a word, ask a question, express any sense of intimacy. There should be no resumption, no explanation. Nothing was to be said about yesterday evening or last night.

"'I must be off,' I murmured hurriedly. 'You stay here and get ready. At noon I will meet you at the entrance to the Casino, and there I will make all necessary arrangements.'

"Before he could answer, I had fled, for my one desire was to see nothing more of that room. Without a word to anyone, I left the hotel, not knowing its name any more than I knew the name of the stranger with whom I had passed the night."

Mrs. C. paused for a while. When she took up her tale again, every sign of tension had disappeared from her voice. She was like a carriage which has laboured up to the top of a mountain pass, and can then roll swiftly and easily down the hill on the other side.

"Well, I hastened to my hotel in the clear morning light. As the streets had been washed clean by the down-pour, so had all sense of torment been washed from my soul. You must not forget what I told you at the outset, that after my husband's death my life had been, as it were, at an end. My children had no need of me, and I had no need of myself. But life is futile unless it be

directed towards a definite goal. Now, unexpectedly, I had found something to do. I had saved a fellow mortal, had snatched him from annihilation by the expenditure of my own energies. Only a few obstacles remained to be overcome, and my mission must be fulfilled to the end. Swiftly, therefore, I sought my hotel, and calmly ignored the porter's surprise that I should turn up in this way at nine o'clock in the morning. The burden of shame at what had happened had been lifted from me. There was a sudden revival of my will-to-live. A new conviction that my existence had a purpose invigorated my whole being like the flow of healthy blood. On reaching my room, I changed my dress, laying aside my mourning (though I did not notice this till later). After going to the bank for some money, I went on to the station in order to ask the times of the trains, and then made various other arrangements with a speed and a firmness of decision at which I was myself amazed. At length there was nothing left to be done. I had now to await the departure, to effect the final rescue, of the man whose fate had by chance become intertwined with mine.

"I must admit that considerable resolution was needed for the fresh encounter. All that had happened previously, had happened in the dark. Like two stones in a torrent when there is a freshet, we had suddenly been whirled into contact. We scarcely knew one another's faces, and I was not even sure whether the stranger would recognize me. Yesterday had been a chance meeting. To-day I had to offer myself up to him far more openly, for now I had to face him in the pitiless light of day.

"But all went off more easily than I had expected. Directly I reached the Casino at the appointed hour, a young man, sitting on a bench hard by, sprang up to greet me. His movements were full of expressiveness; they manifested, in their spontaneity, a strange sense of

happiness. He hastened to meet me, his eyes shining with joy and gratitude; then he lowered his gaze, as if in embarrassment. Gratitude is a rare frame of mind; and those who are grateful can seldom find a way to express what they feel. They are overwhelmed by silence; are shamefaced; and, sometimes, actually try to hide their feelings. But in the case of this man, whom God, like a master sculptor, had gifted with the capacity of expressing all the emotions in their plastic beauty, could show forth gratitude as a passion radiating from the depths of his being. He bent over my hand, lowering his boyish head reverently for a moment, and gently kissed my fingers. Then he withdrew a pace, asked how I was, looked at me pathetically, and spoke to me in a way that betokened so much respect that in a few minutes all my anxieties had vanished. At the same time, as if to give a suitable setting for the tranquillization of my own feelings, the surrounding landscape had become bright and peaceful. The sea, which had been storm-tossed yesterday, was now so calm and clear that every pebble underlying the ripples on the shore was plainly visible; the Casino, that inferno of yesternight, gleamed white on a lovely background of damascened sky; and the kiosk, against whose closed shutters we had pressed to make the most of the inadequate shelter of its pent roof, had this morning blossomed into a flower stall. The stall was filled with a medley of flowers and nosegays, and behind this variegated rampart sat a girl in a brilliant coloured blouse.

"I entertained my young friend at lunch in a little restaurant, and there he told me his tragical story. It served only to confirm what I had guessed when I caught sight of his tremulous hands on the green table. He was born of a good family in Austrian Poland, and had been destined for a diplomatic career. He had been studying in Vienna, and a month ago he had passed his first

examination with great distinction. To celebrate the occasion, his uncle, a military man of high rank who belonged to the general staff and with whom the student was living during his stay in Vienna, took him for a drive in the Prater, and they went together to the race-course. The uncle had made some lucky bets, spotting three winners in succession, and coming away with a thick wad of banknotes. Then the pair had supper in a fashionable restaurant. Next day our budding diplomatist's father, in reward for his success in the examination, sent the lad, as a special gift, a sum equal to his usual monthly allowance.

"Two days before, this would have seemed to him a large amount of money; but now, after yesterday's experience at the races, he looked upon it as a bagatelle. Immediately after luncheon he went to a trotting-match, bet wildly, and, as luck or rather ill-luck would have it, came away from the Prater with thrice as much money as he had taken with him. The gambling fever seized him, and he gave vent to his new passion, not only at the races, but at cards and in other ways, wherever he could stake a coin. He could no longer think of anything else, could no longer control himself. Thoughts of high play disturbed his sleep. After returning home one night from the club where he had lost all the money he had on him, he found when undressing a banknote he had overlooked. At once he put on his clothes again, late though it was, and wandered through the streets till he found a coffee-house still open where the customers were playing dominoes. There he remained, gambling till daybreak. Once his married sister helped him out of his difficulties, paying off the rapacious money-lenders who had been only too ready with advances to this heir of a great name. For a time, after that, he was kept going by a run of luck. Then fortune turned against him, and the more he lost, the more desperate his situation became

thanks to the heaping up of unsecured loans and overdue notes of hand, the more essential did it seem to him that he should win large sums. Long since, he had pawned his watch and most of his clothing. Then came a crowning mishap. He stole from his aunt's jewel-case two valuable gems which she seldom wore. He pawned one of these for a large sum, which he quadrupled that same evening at the gaming table. But instead of withdrawing with his gains, he staked the whole, and lost. His theft had not yet been discovered, so, having pawned the second jewel, and inspired with a sudden determination, he took train to Monte Carlo, in the hope of restoring his fortunes at roulette. He had already sold his portmanteau, what remained of his spare clothing, and even his umbrella. Nothing was left but a revolver with four cartridges, and a little cross set with diamonds given to him by his godmother, Princess X., from which he did not wish to part. But yesterday afternoon, the very day on which I had made his acquaintance, he had at length sold this cross for fifty francs, in order, for the last time, to stake his life upon a cast.

"He told me all this with characteristic grace and charm. I listened, deeply moved, with no thought of virtuous indignation because the man lunching with me was a thief. The day before, had anyone told me that I, a woman of blameless reputation, and one who was in the habit of insisting that her associates must be people of the highest respectability, should within twenty-four hours be hobnobbing with a stranger little older than her son, and that stranger a thief, I should have thought the speaker out of his senses. Yet, I repeat, as the man sat there telling his tale, I was not outraged in the least. He told his story so naturally, so unaffectedly, that the actions he recounted seemed rather the outcome of illness than of crime. Besides, to me, who last night had had an experience so overwhelming, so amazing, the word

'impossible' had suddenly become unmeaning. In those few hours I had learned enormously more of the realities of life than in the previous forty years of my sheltered existence.

"But there was one thing which alarmed me in his confession, and that was the febrile glare in his eyes, the twitching of his features whenever he was speaking of his passion for play. The mere telling of the tale excited him; and his expressive countenance exhibited a tense mingling of pleasure and pain with terrible clearness. Involuntarily his hands, those wonderful, slender, nervous hands, assumed their pose of the gaming table, looked once more like beasts of prey. The fingers were placed as if to clutch something, and then the two hands clasped one another in excitement. When he was telling me about the stealing of the jewels (I trembled as I watched), I saw him act the whole theft; I saw his fingers leap upon their prey, and swiftly hide it in the hollow of the hand. With a nameless fear I realized that the young man was poisoned through and through by his craze for gambling.

"That was the only thing which disturbed, which horrified me in his recital—that a man who by nature seemed serene and care-free should be thus hopelessly enslaved by a mad passion. I therefore regarded it as my first duty to tell my protégé in the friendliest possible way, that he must hasten to leave Monte Carlo, where temptation was at its height; must return to his family on the instant, before the loss of the jewels had been noticed and his future had been permanently overshadowed. I was willing, I said, to supply him with funds for the journey and for the redemption of the jewels, provided that he would set out at once for home and would give me his word of honour never again to touch a card or to gamble in any other way.

"I shall never forget the passion of gratitude with

which he listened to me; I shall never forget how he drank in my words when I promised to help him. Stretching his hands across the table, he grasped mine with a gesture which simultaneously implied adoration and a solemn pledge. Tears filled his eyes; his whole body trembled with joyful excitement. Again and again I have tried to make you realize the extraordinary expressiveness of his features, but his expression at this particular moment is indescribable. It was one of ecstatic and supraterrrestrial happiness, such as the human countenance can so rarely display. I can only compare it to the fleeting image one has sometimes on awaking, when one seems to be looking at the face of an angel for a moment before it slips back into the realm of dreams.

"Why should I conceal from you that this glance was almost too much for me? Gratitude fills us with rejoicing, for it so rarely finds frank expression; delicacy of feeling warms our hearts. To me, who am at ordinary times a cool and self-controlled person, my young friend's exuberance was an entrancing novelty. No doubt the cheerful aspect of nature contributed to my mood. When we emerged from the restaurant, we looked across the calm, blue sea, and up into skies whose blue was likewise untroubled, except for the wings of the gulls flashing white in the distance. You know the Riviera. It is always beautiful; but in its riot of colour it is rather too apt to remind us of a picture postcard; its beauty is inert and slumbrous, utterly indifferent to the onlooker's gaze, almost oriental in its eternal superfluity. But from time to time comes a day when this beauty awakens from its slumber, becomes alert, proclaims itself so to speak with strident, fiercely dazzling colours; makes a victorious parade of its wealth of variegated flowers; glows and burns with sensuality. Such a day had followed the chaos of the previous night's storm. The streets, spick and span after their washing, gleamed white; the heavens

were turquoise; the shrubs, turgid with moisture, were like green torches. In the sunlit air, the mountains looked as if they had suddenly drawn nearer to us. They were eagerly crowding round the sparkling little town. The whole scene was one to fill the heart with joy and courage, and to make man feel his close kinship with nature.

" 'Let's go for a drive along the Corniche,' I said.

"He agreed, enthusiastically. Hitherto his knowledge of the place had been confined to the dull Casino, with its heavy odour of perspiration, its press of gamblers; and to the neighbouring sea, which had been grey, stormy, and inhospitable. Now the huge sweep of coast was spread before us, and our delighted eyes roamed from nearer to more distant points. We drove slowly along the splendid road (this was before the days of motors), past villas and view-points. Again and again, at almost every villa set in pines, the thought naturally rose in one's mind: 'How happily could I live here, quiet, contented, apart from the world!'

"Have I ever been happier than during this drive? I doubt it. Beside me in the carriage sat the young man, so recently doomed to death, now luxuriating in the golden sunshine. Years seemed to have fallen from him. He looked little more than a boy; a pretty, playful child, with bold and yet respectful eyes. Especially charming in him was his watchful sympathy, his readiness to help. On a steep ascent, he would jump out and push behind. If I pointed to a flower by the wayside, he would pick it for me. A little toad, lured forth from its retreat by yesterday's rains, was crawling slowly across the road. He picked it up and carried it tenderly to the grass by the wayside, lest it should be crushed by the wheels of a passing carriage. Meanwhile, he was talking in a lively fashion, speaking of the most whimsical things. His laughter was a sort of safety valve, for in default of this outflow of gaiety, he would positively have jumped for

joy or played mad antics—so intoxicated was he with the rapture of his sudden and unexpected deliverance.

"We were driving through a hamlet, when suddenly he took off his hat, as if to an acquaintance. The action surprised me. He was a stranger in a strange land; whom could he be greeting? I asked if he had seen someone whom he knew. With a slight blush and a somewhat exculpatory manner, he explained that we had just driven past a church, and that in Poland, as in other strictly Catholic countries, boys were taught from earliest childhood to raise their hats when passing a church. This show of respect for religion made a strong appeal to me, and at the same time it reminded me of the jewelled cross he had mentioned.

" 'Are you a practising Catholic?' I asked.

" 'Yes,' he answered a trifle bashfully; 'I hope that I have my share in God's grace.'

"Thereupon a thought struck me. I called to the coachman to pull up, and jumped out of the carriage.

"Following me in obvious surprise, he asked:

" 'Where are we going?'

" 'Come with me,' was all that I replied.

"I led the way back to the church. A village church, built of brick. In the half-light of the interior, the white-washed walls looked grey, contrasting with the yellow cone of sunshine which made its way in through the open door. At the eastern end, the altar was almost in darkness, except for the sanctuary lamp whose fitful glow shone through the warm, incense-freighted air. As we entered, he dipped his fingers in the holy-water stoop, crossed himself, and genuflected. Then I made my purpose known to him.

" 'Go up to the altar,' I said, 'or to the image of the saint for whom you have a special veneration. I want you to make a vow there.'

"He looked at me with astonishment, almost with

alarm. But, complying, he went to a side altar, crossed himself and knelt down.

"‘Say after me,’ I said, trembling with excitement, ‘say after me: “I solemnly vow . . .”’

“He repeated the words:

“‘I solemnly vow . . .’

“I went on: ‘that I shall never again gamble in any way whatever, that I shall never again expose my life and my honour to the risks of this passion.’

“Falteringly, he repeated the words; but they rang out clearly in the little church, which we had entirely to ourselves. Silence followed, and lasted a few moments. So still was it, that I could hear the foliage rustling in the breeze outside. Then the young man began to speak hurriedly and ecstatically. He spoke Polish, and therefore I could not understand him. It was obvious, however, that he was praying—a prayer of thanksgiving and contrition—for now and again the agitated penitent lowered his head meekly, the passionate though unintelligible words flowed faster and ever faster, and one particular succession of sounds came to my ears more frequently and with increasing emphasis. Never before or since have I witnessed such fervent supplications. Convulsively he gripped the back of the prie-dieu; his body was shaken by an inward storm. He had become oblivious of his surroundings; his emotions had translated him into another world, into purgatory or paradise. At length he rose to his feet, made the sign of the cross, and turned away from the altar. His knees were trembling, and his face was pale with exhaustion. But when he caught sight of me, his eyes lighted up, and a smile of genuine piety played round his lips. Drawing near, he bowed low, after the Polish fashion, took both my hands, and kissed them respectfully.

“‘God sent you to me. I have been thanking him for doing so.’

TWENTY-FOUR HOURS IN A WOMAN'S LIFE

"I was at a loss for words to answer him. What would have suited my mood would have been a loud peal of organ music, for I was convinced, unshakably convinced, that the man was saved once for all.

"We left the church and stood in the dazzling sunlight. The world had never seemed more lovely. For two hours we continued to drive along that splendid road, where each turn disclosed a new and glorious prospect of the hills. We said nothing more. After this outburst of sacred emotion, words would have been a profanation. When, from time to time, my eyes encountered his, I had to turn them away, for I could hardly bear to look at the miracle I had wrought.

"By five o'clock that afternoon we were back in Monte Carlo. I had an engagement to meet some relatives, an engagement I could not very well break. Moreover, I needed a change of scene, a relaxation of tension, for my excess of delight had become a strain. I knew that I must seek rest and distraction after such unaccustomed ecstasy. I therefore asked my protégé to come with me to my hotel for a moment, and there I gave him the money he needed for his journey and for the redemption of the pawned jewels. We arranged that he should take his ticket while I was with my relatives, and that we should meet again at the station booking-office at seven o'clock, half an hour before the train left. But when I was about to hand him the banknotes, his lips suddenly turned pale.

"'No, no! Not money! Please don't give me money,' he stammered, his fingers twitching the while. 'No money! I can't bear to look at it!'

"I overcame his scruples by telling him he could regard the money as a loan, and that if it would make his mind easier he could give me a note-of-hand for the amount.

" 'Yes, a note-of-hand,' he murmured, turning his eyes away.

"Taking the banknotes, reluctantly, as if they might soil his fingers, he thrust them into his pocket without looking at them, and, sitting down at the writing-table, hastily scribbled a few words. When he looked up at me, I saw that there were beads of sweat on his forehead. He was choking with emotion, and hardly had he given me his note-of-hand when he fell upon his knees and kissed the hem of my garment. I was so confounded by this unwonted gesture, that I could hardly speak. Still, I managed to get out a few words:

" 'I am deeply touched by your gratitude. You had better leave me now. We will say good-bye at the station this evening.'

"He, too, was overpowered by his feelings, and could not utter a word. He turned, and left the room."

Mrs. C. rose and went to the window again. For several minutes, she stood there in silence, looking out, motionless except for a slight tremor, which was visible enough though her back was turned to me. Then, animated by a sudden resolve, she came back to her seat. Making a gesture as if she were tearing something in twain, she looked at me fearlessly, with an expression which was almost hard, and went on:

"I pledged myself to be frank, and now I see how essential it was to give such a pledge. To-day, when I come to tell you in orderly fashion all that took place during those hours, when I try to find words for the description of all the complicated feelings I then experienced, I grasp the plain significance of much which I could not or perhaps would not understand at the time. That is why I must be firm, must tell you the whole truth. At the instant when the young man left me alone in my room, I suddenly felt stricken to the heart. I had

a pang of almost mortal agony—and yet I could not understand, or refused to understand, why it was that my protégé's extremely respectful attitude wounded me so deeply.

"To-day, when I am compelling myself to reproduce the past, to deal with my own memories as dispassionately as if I were telling the story of a stranger, to ignore a sense of shame which might lead me to hide something from your gaze—I know, I know with certainty, that what wounded me was my disappointment that the young man had shown such instant obedience; that he had made no attempt to keep me, to stay beside me; that he had humbly and respectfully complied with my first wish that he should return home . . . instead, instead, . . . instead of trying to grasp me for his own. I was wounded because he honoured me as a saint who had lighted his path, but did not love me as a woman.

"There was the source of my disappointment. Neither then nor later would I admit that I was disappointed. Whatever a woman's reason may say, her feelings tell her the truth. To-day, I no longer deceive myself. To-day, I know that if this man had put his arms round me, had wooed me, I would gladly have gone with him to the ends of the world. I should have thought nothing of bringing dishonour upon my name and upon that of my children; I should not have cared a jot for what people might say or what prudence might dictate; I should have run away with him, just as Madame Henriette ran away with that young Frenchman whom she had known for twenty-four hours. I should not have asked where I was going with him, or for how long; nor should I have given a thought to any of the claims established by my life prior to that day. For this man, I should have sacrificed fortune, worldly position, honour. I would have become a beggar, for his sake, and for his sake I should probably have been willing to commit any conceivable infamy.

So absolutely was I in his power at that moment, that I should have cast shame to the winds, should have been utterly indifferent to the opinion of my fellow mortals, had he but said a word to me, had he but taken a step towards me, had he but tried to clasp me in his arms.

"Yet, as I told you, so far as I was concerned this man seemed strangely apathetic; he no longer saw the woman in me. Not until he had gone did I begin to become aware of my own feelings. Not until then did I realize all the ardours that had stirred in me at sight of his seraphic countenance. When he had left me, I felt utterly forsaken. Well, I had to pull myself together; had to keep the appointment, which now seemed more than ever distasteful. I felt as if my head were prisoned within a heavy iron helmet; and as I walked to the hotel where my relatives were expecting me, my thoughts were as vague and uncertain as my footsteps. Sitting among these people, I listened impassively to their chatter, but was startled whenever I looked at their faces, for these showed no trace of vivid emotion, but looked like masks, looked petrified in comparison with my young friend's face, which had displayed such an animated contrast of lights and shades. I might have been among corpses! While I sat there sipping my tea and absently talking about indifferent matters, I was picturing one face, the face I now delighted to look at, the face which, in a couple of hours, I was to behold for the last time. I must have sighed involuntarily, for suddenly my husband's cousin anxiously inquired whether I was feeling ill, saying that I certainly looked pale and out of sorts. The question gave me an opening, and I replied that I had a bad headache, and would ask her to forgive my paying a very short visit.

"I hastened back to my hotel. As soon as I was alone, I was again overwhelmed by the sense of vacancy, the feeling that I was about to be forsaken, coupled with a

yearning for the youth from whom I was to be parted. I paced up and down the room, needlessly opened one drawer after another, changed my dress, and then stood in front of the mirror, looking at my image questioningly, and wondering whether my appearance was such as could prove attractive to him. Then I formed a head-long resolution that I would do anything, anything in the world, if only I could stay with him. I ran down to the hall, and told the porter that I was going away that evening. Then, returning to my room, I rang for the chambermaid, and asked her to help me pack, as I was in a great hurry. While, at top speed, we were engaged in this occupation, I was thinking of the way in which I would take him by surprise. I should go with him to the train, and then, at the very last moment, when he gave me his hand in farewell, I should suddenly get into the compartment with him, to be with him that night, and the night afterwards—for as long as he cared to have me with him. My pulses throbbed in a frenzy of delight. I fancy that the chambermaid must have thought me crazy, for more than once I laughed outright at the rapture of my own thoughts. I was, in fact, hardly in my right senses. When the boots came to take down my trunks, I stared at him vacantly for a moment, unable to get into touch with the realities of the situation.

"Time pressed. It must be nearly seven, little more than twenty minutes before the train was due to leave.

"'No matter,' I thought, 'this will not be a hurried farewell, for I'm going with him, I'm going to stay with him for as long as he will let me.' I went to the office to pay my bill, and the manager had just given me the change, when I felt someone's hand gently placed on my shoulder. I started, and turned round. There stood my cousin. Uneasy about the state of my health, she had come to see me. This was a disastrous interruption. Every instant was vital, and nevertheless common polite-

ness made it necessary for me to stand there talking to her.

" 'You must go to bed,' she insisted, 'I'm sure you've got fever.'

"She might well think so. I could almost fancy it myself, for my temples were throbbing and I felt faint. But I managed to keep my composure, and tried to appear grateful for her solicitude, though every word she said racked my nerves, and I would fain have stormed at her for her unasked intervention. There she stayed, stayed, stayed; offered me eau-de-Cologne, and insisted on dabbing my forehead with it. I counted the minutes, thought of him, wondered how I could rid myself of this fussy interference. But the more obvious my uneasiness, the more convinced did she become that there was something seriously amiss with me, till, in the end, she was on the point of using force in the endeavour to make me go to my room and lie down. Then, while she was still speaking to me, I looked once more at the hall clock. It was two minutes to the half hour, and the train was due to leave at seven thirty-five. Brusquely, with the ruthless indifference of one who is at his wits' end, I stretched out my hand to my cousin, saying:

" 'Good-bye. I must go!'

"Regardless of her amazement, ignoring the surprised looks of the hotel staff, I rushed out and tore along the street to the station. The excited gesticulations of the boots, who stood waiting there with my luggage, were enough to show that I had run things very fine. I raced to the barrier, but the ticket collector refused to let me pass without a ticket. Even as I was trying to persuade him to allow me through, was almost endeavouring to force my way on to the platform, the train began to move. I stared at it, trembling in every limb, and hoping to catch at least a glimpse of him through one of the windows, to exchange a farewell greeting. The train

gathered speed ; I could not make out his face anywhere. In a few seconds, it was all over, and there was nothing left but a black cloud which seemed to swim before my distraught eyes.

"I stood there for a while as if turned to stone, for the boots must certainly have spoken to me several times before he ventured to touch my arm. He wanted to know whether he was to take my luggage back to the hotel. I had to think things over for a minute or two. No, I could not face the thought of going back to the hotel after that ludicrous departure. Impatiently (for all I wanted was to be alone), I told him to take my boxes to the cloak-room. Then, left to myself in the station, alone amid the turmoil, I did my utmost to recover my composure, to think clearly once more, to escape from the helter-skelter of stormy emotions—from anger, remorse, and despair on account of this hopeless fiasco. I could have screamed aloud at the agony of the pitiless conviction that it had all been my own fault. Perhaps it is only people who, generally speaking, are comparatively passionless that can experience such moments when passion overwhelms them like an avalanche, devastates them with the force of a volcanic eruption ; for in them, at such moments, the unutilized and accumulated energies of years run riot. Never before or since have I known anything like the mingled sense of stupefaction and frenzied impotence from which I suffered on this occasion. I had been ready for a desperate venture ; had been ready, lightheartedly, to part with the safeguards of a sheltered existence. Then, of a sudden, I was faced by a wall against which my passions beat in vain.

"It was natural that I should do something foolish. What I now did was so foolish that I hesitate to tell you about it, and should not tell you if I had not promised you and myself to be absolutely frank. I sought him once more. I mean that I tried to reconstruct all the moments

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I had spent with him. I was drawn, as if by an irresistible force, towards all the places where we had been together the day before: towards the bench in the garden where I had seized him by the arm in order to drag him into shelter; towards the Casino where I had first seen him; even towards the house of accommodation where I had passed the night with him. I wanted to relive the past. Next day, I would drive along the Corniche, recalling his every word, his every gesture. You may, possibly, think me an imbecile. But you must remember, in excuse, how terrible had been the shock I had just experienced. Was it not natural that, on coming to myself thereafter, I should wish to relive those fleeting experiences, that I should wish to enjoy that magical self-deception which we call memory? Some people will understand, and others will be unable to understand. Perhaps those only can understand whose hearts burn.

"I went first to the Casino, sought out the table where he had been playing, intending there to imagine his hands among all the hands of the gamblers. It was the leftward table in the second room. I could have found my way thither with my eyes shut, as automatically as a sleepwalker. I entered, and walked straight across the hall. Then came something utterly inconceivable. In the very place I had been picturing, I saw him seated in the flesh. No, it was not the hallucination of a fever. He was there once more, just as I had seen him the day before, pallid of face, eyes fixed on the rolling ball. There was no mistaking him.

"I was so shaken by the sight, that I was on the verge of screaming out loud; and although I managed to control myself, I had to close my eyes against the incredible apparition.

" 'You are mad; you are dreaming; you are fever-stricken,' I said to myself. 'It cannot possibly be he, for he left by train half an hour ago.'

"I opened my eyes again. How horrible! There he sat, just as before, unmistakable. I should have known his hands among millions. It was no dream, but a dreadful reality. He had not taken the train home as he had promised. The madman sat there at the roulette board. He had brought to the green table all the money I had given him for the journey. Forgetting everything else, he had surrendered once more to his passion for play, at the very time when my heart was being racked by the thought of him.

"An irresistible impulse thrust me forward. I saw red. I longed to take him by the throat, this perjurer who had so shamefully violated my confidence, outraged my feelings, scorned my self-sacrifice. But I retained a measure of self-control. At the cost of a mighty effort, I was able to walk slowly to the opposite side of the table, where a gentleman courteously drew aside to make room for me. There were but six feet of green cloth between us, and, as if from the dress circle in a theatre, I could look down on to his face—the face which little more than two hours before I had seen transfigured with gratitude, illuminated by divine grace, though now possessed by the infernal tremors of the gamester's lust. The hands, which that very afternoon I had seen clasping the prie-dieu when he was taking his solemn vow, were now twitching once more as he handled his winnings. He had been in luck, and must have won a great deal. On the table, immediately in front of him, was a confused heap of counters and louis d'or and banknotes—a medley over which his fingers hovered covetously. I watched him caressing the notes and coins, and from time to time seizing a handful to stake on one of the squares. Whenever he did this, his nostrils quivered in the old way. He listened eagerly for the call of the croupier, and watched the circling ball. Indeed, his utter absorption in what he was doing seemed even more horrible to me than it had seemed the night

before, now that each one of his movements was a fresh stab to the heart of that entrancing image of him I had enshrined in my memory during the afternoon.

"Across that six feet of green cloth I stared at him, while he remained oblivious of my presence. He did not look up. He saw no one; saw nothing but the heap of winnings, the stake, and the whirling ball. On these his senses were fixed. That was his world, the gambler's world. I might stand opposite to him for hours without his becoming aware of my neighbourhood.

"I could bear it no longer. Walking round the table, I gripped him by the shoulder. He looked up with the glassy stare of a drunkard who has just been forcibly awakened, and whose intelligence is still clouded by the poison that is circulating in his blood. At last he recognized me, and, with a fatuously cheerful expression, and an implication that he and I shared a mysterious secret, he said:

" 'I am getting on famously. I knew it would be all right, directly I came in and saw that He was here. I knew at once . . . '

"I did not understand him. It was plain to me that he was intoxicated by the passion for play; that he was a madman who had forgotten everything, forgotten his vow, forgotten me and the world. Yet even in this obsession of his, his ecstasy had its effect on me, so that involuntarily I could not help asking him to whom he referred.

" 'There, that old Russian general, the man with one arm,' he whispered for my ear alone. 'That man with the white mutton-chop whiskers and the servant standing behind him. He always wins. I was watching him yesterday. He must have a system, and I stake on the same chances. . . . He won all the time yesterday. My mistake was that I went on playing after he had gone. He must have won twenty thousand francs yesterday;

and to-day it is just the same. I follow his lead all the time. . . .'

"Suddenly he broke off, for the croupier had called: '*Faites votre jeu.*' The young man looked eagerly across at the Russian, who gravely, with an indifferent yet thoughtful mien, placed one, and then, rather hesitatingly, a second gold piece in the fourth square. Instantly the eager hands before me seized a fistful of gold coins and staked them in the same square. A minute later, when the croupier called 'zero,' and with one sweep of his rake cleared all the stakes from the table, my infatuated gambler watched the disappearance of his money as if a miracle had been wrought. Do you think he looked up at me now? Not at all! He had utterly forgotten my presence. I had dropped out of his life once more. He could see nothing but the Russian general, who with well-bred composure, was fingering a couple of gold coins, still undecided where to stake them.

"How can I make you understand my bitterness, my despair. Think what it must have meant to me when I found that to this man, for whom I had been ready to sacrifice my whole life, I was worth no more than a fly that one brushes off with a careless hand. Again wrath overwhelmed me. Again I seized his arm, and this time tried to drag him to his feet.

" 'Get up!' I whispered authoritatively. 'Remember, wretched perjurer, what you swore to-day in the church.'

"He stared at me, pale and shaken. His eyes looked like those of a whipped dog. The past had rushed back into his memory, and he was filled with horror at himself.

" 'Yes, yes,' he stammered. 'Good God! I am coming. Forgive me.'

"With a vehement motion he began to gather up the pile of money, but then his hand grew hesitant, as if an antagonistic force were at work. His eyes had gone back

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to the Russian general, who was just placing his stake.

" 'One moment!'

"He put five louis on the same square..

" 'Once more, only once more; then I promise you I'll come away. One more stake; only one!'

"His voice died away. The ball had started to roll, and his attention was once more riveted upon its revolutions. His obsession had snatched him from me and from himself, had trapped him within the circle round which the little ball was leaping on its way. Again the croupier proclaimed the result; again the stake was raked in. This was to have been the young gambler's last hazard. But he did not turn round towards me. He had forgotten me, as he had forgotten the vow taken in the afternoon, as he had forgotten the pledge given me only a moment before. Once more his covetous hand moved to the pile of money; and once more he had no eyes for anyone but the luck-bringing Russian general.

"My patience was at an end. I shook him by the shoulder, more vigorously than ever, saying:

" 'Get up, get up, instantly. You promised me that should be your last.'

"Now something unexpected happened. He turned impatiently towards me, but the face he showed me was neither humble, nor perplexed. It was furious. His eyes flashed with anger as he exclaimed:

" 'Let me alone. Go away! You spoil my luck. I always lose when you are there. You spoiled my luck yesterday, and you are doing the same to-day. Clear out!'

"For a moment, I was rigid with astonishment. Then my anger flamed up to match his.

" 'I spoil your luck, do I? Liar and thief, you swore . . .'

"I got no further, for the madman sprang from his seat, and thrust me back, regardless of the bystanders.

TWENTY-FOUR HOURS IN A WOMAN'S LIFE

"'Let me alone,' he screamed at the top of his voice. 'I am not under your guardianship. There, there, there, is your money'—and he threw some banknotes at me. 'Now leave me in peace!'

"He had shouted these words like a maniac, paying no heed to the hundred or more people in the room. They stared at us; whispered, pointed, laughed. Others were crowding in from the next room to see what the row was about. I felt as if all my clothing had suddenly been torn off, leaving me naked before those mocking eyes.

"'Silence, Madame, *s'il vous plait!*' called the croupier imperiously, rapping the table with his rake.

"Utterly humiliated, overwhelmed with shame, I faced that whispering crowd, feeling like a prostitute to whom some money has been contemptuously flung. Two hundred, three hundred eyes were staring me out of countenance. Then, when it became more than I could bear, and I turned aside, my glance met one pair of eyes in particular. I saw the astounded face of my cousin, who was gazing at me open-mouthed, her hands raised in alarm.

"This was too much for me, and by a sudden impulse (before she could stir, before she could recover from her surprise) I rushed from the room, from the Casino, and down the steps to the very bench on which, the night before, the young gambler had collapsed. No less exhausted, no less crushed, than he had been, did I now collapse upon the hard and unsympathetic wood.

"That was twenty-four years ago. Even now, when I recall how I stood there lashed by his scorn and pierced by the pitiless eyes of all those strangers, the blood runs cold in my veins. And when I think of all that happened, I realize ever and again with renewed horror how weak and pitiful and frail must be that which we speak of

magniloquently as soul or spirit or sentiment, that which we dignify by the name of pain—since, even in its extremest form, what is spoken of as spiritual pain cannot utterly destroy the tortured body; since, even after such hours, we go on living almost as if nothing had happened, instead of falling instantly into ruins like a tree riven by lightning. Only for a few brief moments did the pain deprive me of the power of motion, so that I sank upon the bench panting, numbed, and with an almost pleasurable conviction that I was at the point of death. Pain is a coward. He flees when faced by the irresistible power of the will-to-live, which is more strongly rooted in the flesh than the intensest passion is rooted in the spirit.

“Even to myself it seems almost inexplicable that I could have got up from that bench again. But rise I did, though at first without any definite purpose. Then it suddenly occurred to me that my trunks were ready packed in the station cloakroom; and from this thought, by a natural sequence, my fancy turned to the idea of flight. Away, away, only to get away from this accursed hell. I hurried to the station, and asked how soon there would be a train to Paris. The next train would leave at ten, I learned, and instantly I had my baggage registered for the journey.

“Ten o’clock. Exactly twenty-four hours had gone by since that fateful meeting; twenty-four hours filled with such storms of conflicting emotion that my inner peace had been shattered for ever. For the moment I could think of nothing but flight. ‘Away! Away! Away!’ The words throbbed rhythmically in my temples. ‘Away! Away! Away!’ Away from this town; away from myself; home, to rejoin my own people; back to the familiar surroundings of my earlier life.

“I travelled all night and reached Paris in the morning; drove across the city; took train to Boulogne; boat

to Folkestone; train to London; then from London to join my son. All this in one pulse of flight; without planning and without thinking; forty-eight hours without sleeping or speaking or eating; forty-eight hours throughout which the wheels of the train or of the cab, and the engines on the boat, beat out an unceasing refrain: 'Away! Away! Away!'

"When I at length reached the country house where no one expected me, my son and everyone else were alarmed at my appearance. Something in my look or manner must have betrayed that I had been through a crisis. My son wanted to put his arms round me and give me a kiss. I drew back, for it seemed intolerable that he should touch lips which to my thinking had been defiled. I refused to answer any questions, and said that the only thing I needed was a bath. This need was a very real one. I wanted to cleanse my body, not merely from the stains of travel, but from the besoilment which still clung to it—so I fancied—after its contact with the madman. Then I retired to my room and slept heavily for twelve or fourteen hours, a sleep of absolute torpor from which I learned what it must be like to lie dead in a coffin. My relatives cared for me as for an invalid, but their kindly attentions were only a distress to me. Their respect filled me with shame. I had continually to be on my guard lest I should burst into confession, telling them how I had betrayed, forgotten, forsaken them all under stress of a mad passion.

"After a while, therefore, I made my way to a small provincial town in France, a place where I did not know a soul, for I had a fixed idea that anyone could see at the first glance that I was a disgraced woman. This was the outcome of my profound conviction that I had been deceived and besmirched. Often, when I awoke in the morning, I was afraid to open my eyes. The memory of that dreadful awakening in the house of accommodation

at Monte Carlo was still so vivid that I dreaded lest I should find a half-naked stranger beside me—and with the thought there recurred the longing I had had on that occasion, the overpowering wish for instant death.

"Time has powers of healing, and age has a strange influence in blunting the edge of our feelings. As we grow old, we become aware that death is drawing near; his shadow falls across our path; the realities of life seem less crude than of yore, they touch our senses less intimately, and they lose much of their poignancy. In due time, I recovered from the shock. Years afterwards, in society, I met a young Pole who was an attaché at the Austrian embassy in London. From a casual remark he made, I learned that he was related to the family of the man I had met in Monte Carlo; and some cautious inquiries brought me the information that the youth had shot himself ten years before in Monte Carlo. The news left my withers unwrung. Nay more (why should one pretend to be free from such egoism), it was actually agreeable to me, for now the last fear of meeting him in the flesh had been removed. The only surviving witness against me was my own memory. Since then, I have been more tranquil. To grow old means to be rid of anxieties about the past.

"Now you will understand why the impulse seized me to tell you my story. When you espoused the cause of Madame Henriette, passionately declaring that four-and-twenty hours' acquaintanceship with a man might easily determine a woman's fate, you were voicing the result of my own experience. I was grateful to you for what you said, since it confirmed that experience. Was it not natural that the thought should cross my mind to tell you all that had happened to me? Let me rid my soul of its burden; lift the spell. Such was my purpose. Then I should be free from the eternal compulsion towards reminiscence. Then, perhaps, it would become

possible for me to revisit the Casino in which I had met my fate, and to do so dispassionately, without having my whole being filled with hatred for him and for myself. The stone would have been rolled away, the stone that has lain so heavily upon all my past, the stone which has prevented the resurrection of my spirit. It has done me good to tell you of this experience. I feel easier in my mind, and almost cheerful. I am grateful."

Mrs. C. stood up, and I realized that the end had come. I was a trifle embarrassed, and did not quite know what to say. Aware of this, she hastened to put me at my ease, and at the same time to forbid any comment.

"No, please don't say a word. I would rather you kept your own counsel. Be content to accept my thanks for listening to me. Good-bye, and a pleasant journey."

She held her hand out in farewell. Involuntarily I glanced at her face, and it seemed to me wonderfully touching, the face of the old woman who stood before me looking kindly and just a little ashamed. It may have been the reflex of past passion, it may have been confusion—but one or the other had tinged her cheeks with colour. Thus, white hair notwithstanding, she looked girlish, perplexed by her memories, and abashed by her own confession. So much moved was I, that I longed to say something that might suitably betoken my respect. But she had forbidden me to speak, and anyhow words failed me. In parting I stooped and kissed her hand, which trembled under my lips like a leaf in the autumn wind.

A FAILING HEART



AT times, Faté can shatter a heart without mighty blows, without the crude use of force. In her uncontrollable desire to play with human material, she is often pleased to effect her destructive purposes by trivial and transient happenings. That is why we are apt to be astonished by the disproportion between the effect and its ostensible cause. Just as little as an illness begins only when its presence is detected, just so little does a human destiny begin only at the moment when it is made manifest. Destiny is at work upon the inner life, moulding flesh and spirit, long before its workings are outwardly visible. Self-knowledge in these matters is already an attempt at self-defence—but usually comes too late.

At Easter, Salomonsohn had taken his family to Gardone. One night, the old man awoke in severe pain; he felt as if his body were girdled with an iron band, and he found it difficult to draw his breath. His doctor had ordered him to Carlsbad, for he suffered from gall-stones. For the sake of his family, however, he had scouted medical advice, and had come to Gardone. Fearing that this was one of the usual attacks, he anxiously fingered his corpulent body, but was soon relieved in mind though the pain continued. It was, he decided, nothing more than a fit of indigestion, brought on by the Italian diet, to which he was unaccustomed; or perhaps he had been poisoned by tainted food. Either alternative seemed less alarming than gall-stone colic.

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The pain and the sense of pressure persisted. He could lie still no longer. Heavily, and with a groan, he got out of bed, and paced up and down the room. The upright position and the movement soon eased him considerably. But the narrow room felt like a prison. Moreover, his wife was sleeping in the other bed; he was afraid of waking her, and of making her needlessly anxious. Putting on dressing gown and slippers, he stole into the corridor, convinced that he would feel better still if he could stretch his legs freely.

As he opened the bedroom door, the neighbouring church clock struck, and was plainly audible through the widely opened window; it was four o'clock in the morning. The long passage was in darkness. But the old man knew his surroundings perfectly well, thanks to his daylight memories. The corridor was wide and straight. Drawing deep breaths, he strode freely from one end to the other, feeling better at every turn. The sense of oppression was rapidly passing off. So much good had the exercise done him, that he was on the point of going back to his room when a noise startled him. He heard the sound of whispering in the dark; faint but unmistakable. The boards creaked; more whispers; something moved; then the darkness was pierced by a light that flashed through the chink of an opening door. Involuntarily, the old man shrank back into a corner. Not that he was inquisitive! He felt a little ashamed of his position, and was loath to be caught in his nocturnal wanderings. Even as he drew back, when the light streamed for a moment across the passage, he caught sight of a woman's figure clothed in white. She slipped out of the room and moved towards the other end of the passage. He heard the sound of a closing door. Then all was quiet.

The old man staggered, as if wounded to the heart. At that end of the passage, whence the sound of the

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closing door had come, the only rooms were those of the little suite occupied by his own family. The figure was certainly not that of his wife, whom he had left sound asleep a few minutes earlier. There was no escape from the inference that it had been his daughter, Erna, a girl of nineteen.

He shuddered at the thought. How could it have been Erna? True, she was a high-spirited lass, but she was little more than a child! Surely he must have made a mistake. What could she have been doing in a strange room, unless? . . . He tried to thrust away the thought as if it were a beast of prey, but he could not rid himself of it. He must have certainty at any cost. Gasping for breath, he groped his way along the passage to the door of her room, which was next his own. Alas, under the door and through the keyhole, a tell-tale light shone. Then he heard the click of the switch within, and all was dark again. No use trying to persuade himself that he had made a mistake. It was Erna, his daughter Erna, who at four o'clock in the morning had slipped out of a strange bed and made her way back to her own.

Old Salomonsohn trembled with horror; he broke out into a cold sweat. His first thought was to burst open the door, to give the shameless young woman a sound pommelling with his bare fists. But his legs were giving way beneath him. He had hardly the strength to reach his room; and, once there, he dropped heavily into his bed, as heavily as a poleaxed steer.

Inert he lay, staring into the darkness. From the other bed came the sound of his wife's breathing, regular and unconcerned. He had an impulse to awaken her, to tell her of his horrible discovery, to give vent to his rage. Yet how could he utter the words? Impossible! What was he to do?

He tried to reflect, but his thoughts were in a turmoil;

they flew about blindly like bats. It seemed utterly incredible. Erna, his gentle girl, so well behaved, with her caressive eyes. . . . Not so very long ago, he had found her sitting over her reading book, her little rosy finger moving along the lines as she laboriously deciphered the printed words. When was it that, bringing her home from school in her pale-blue frock, he had taken her into a sweet shop and she had kissed him afterwards with sticky lips? Surely it was but yesterday? No! Years and years had gone by since then. Yet it had really been yesterday that she had pleaded with him, just like a child, cajoling him into buying her a blue-and-gold pullover she had taken a fancy to in a shop window. "Please, please!" putting her hands together beseechingly, with that confident smile he was never able to resist. Now, a few inches from his own door, she had crept out of her room to seek a strange man's bed!

"Good God! Good God!" groaned Salomonsohn. "Oh the shame of it, the disgrace! My little girl, so carefully brought up! Who can the fellow be? We have only been here three days. She had never met any of these young coxcombs before; neither that lantern-jawed Conte Ubaldi, nor the Italian officer, nor the gentleman jockey from Mecklenburg. She only made their acquaintance at the dance the day after our arrival, and I am to suppose that already . . . This cannot possibly have been the outcome of a first meeting. It must be an old story; must have begun at home; and I, fool that I am, had no inkling of it. After all, what do I know about them? I spend the whole day working for them, fourteen hours at my desk, just as, long ago, I used to travel with my box of samples—only to earn money for them, money, money in abundance, so that they can buy fine clothes, play at being rich. In the evenings, when I come home tired to death, off they go to the theatre, to an evening party, to a dance. What do I know about how they

spent their days. The only thing I know is that this very night, my girl has given her young body to a man, just as if she were a street-walker. The shame of it! The disgrace!"

He groaned once more. Each new thought deepened the wound. He felt as if his brain had been torn open, and as if red maggots were wriggling in the tear.

"Why have I put up with all this? Why am I lying here tormenting myself while she, the little harlot, snuggles down comfortably to sleep? Why do I not go straight to her room and tell her that I know all about her disgrace? Why do I not go and give her a sound thrashing? Because I am a weakling! Because I am a coward! I have always been weak in my relations with the pair of them, have always given way to them. I delight in making life easy for them, to any cost to myself. I made my hands sore with piling up money for them, penny by penny; working my fingers to the bone, so that they might be well satisfied. No sooner had I made them rich, than they grew ashamed of me. I was no longer elegant enough for their taste. To them I seemed uncultured. How could I be anything else? I had to leave school when I was twelve, and to start earning a livelihood right away; carrying my box of samples from village to village, and then becoming a town traveller, until I could set up in business for myself. When we had risen in the world, and could live in a house of our own, my good old name was not good enough for them. I had to buy myself a beggarly title, so that she need no longer be addressed as plain Mrs. Salomonsohn. They wanted to become genteel. They laughed me to scorn when I protested against all this gentility; when I complained of their fondness for 'good' society; when I told them how my mother (peace to her soul!) had kept house unpretentiously, thinking only of her husband and her children. They called me old-

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fashioned. 'You're old-fashioned, Father,' they said, mockingly. Yes, I was old-fashioned! And now my daughter, my only daughter, spends the night in bed with strangers! The shame of it! The shame of it!"

Amid the torments of his reflections, he sighed so often and so loudly that he roused his wife from her slumbers.

"What's the matter?" she asked, drowsily.

The old man made no answer; he held his breath till she had dozed off again. Then, until dawn came, and it was time to get up, he lay motionless, in mental anguish, gnawed by horrible thoughts.

He was the first to appear at the breakfast table, where he seated himself with a dismal groan. The food almost choked him.

"Alone," he thought. "Always alone! When I go to the office in the morning, they're still asleep, lazing abed, tired out by their dances and theatre-goings. Then, when I come home in the evening, it is to be alone once more, for they have started on their round of amusements, where they certainly don't want my company. . . . Money, this cursed money, has spoiled them, has estranged them from me. Fool that I am, I have piled it up for them, thus robbing myself, impoverishing myself, and corrupting them. I have toiled and moiled for fifty years, grudging myself even a day's holiday—to be alone in the world at last!"

He grew more and more impatient.

"Why on earth doesn't she come? I must thrash matters out with her. We must get away from here instantly. Why doesn't she come? I suppose she's not fully rested yet, and is sleeping soundly with an easy conscience, while I, fool that I am, sit here eating my heart out. As for Mother, she spends hours at the toilet table, manicuring, hair curling. . . . Never puts in an appearance before eleven. I suppose it's natural enough

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that her daughter should go astray! Money, this wretched money!"

A light footfall, and Erna is standing at his back.

"Good morning, Dad! Had a good night?"

The girl bends over him, gives him a butterfly kiss on the forehead. Involuntarily he draws away his head; not only because he loathes her favourite scent, but also . . .

"What's the matter, Father? Wrong side of your bed again? Coffee, waiter, ham and eggs! Slept badly? Or had bad news?"

The old man makes no answer. He bows his head, for he cannot bear to meet her eyes. He can see nothing but her hands as she takes her place at the table. Those hands he is so fond of. . . . Like his wife's hands . . . carefully manicured. Now, lithe as greyhounds, these little hands are sporting on the field of white cloth. He trembles. Timidly his gaze travels up the virginal arms. Often, in the old days (was it so long ago?), they had clasped him when she said good-night. He sees the gentle swell of her breasts, which move beneath the new pull-over as she breathes. . . .

"A stranger was toying with them last night," he thinks bitterly. "The brute has caressed, has handled, has enjoyed all her sweetness. My own flesh and blood! My own daughter!"

Unconsciously, he gives vent to another deep sigh.

"What's the matter, Dad?" she asks affectionately.

"What's the matter?" The words form themselves in his mind, but he does not utter them. "My daughter is a whore—and I have not the courage to tell her that I know it."

He can only mutter, "Nothing, nothing!"

Seizing the newspaper, he sets it up as a barricade against her questioning gaze, for he finds it ever more impossible to meet her eyes. His hands shake. "Now is the time to speak, now, when we are alone together."

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This thought hammers at his brain, but his voice refuses to utter it.

Suddenly he jumps to his feet, thrusts back his chair, and strides ponderously through the French window into the garden. He knows that, in another moment, tears will be streaming down his cheeks, and he does not wish Erna to see them.

Now, a pathetic figure, an elderly man with legs too short for his body, he wandered about the garden and stared for a long time at the lake. Though his eyes were swimming with tears, he could not fail to see the beauty of the landscape. The silvery waters were set in a framework of sombre, green foothills, hatched with yet darker lines by plantations of cypresses. Farther back were the steeper slopes of the mountains, looking down seriously but without arrogance upon the beauties of the lake, as grave men will watch the innocent games of well-beloved children. This timeless and blessed smile of God in the warm south—how frank, flower-bedecked, and hospitable it is; how it invites to cheerfulness and serenity!

"Cheerfulness? Serenity?" The old man shook his head sadly. "Yes, a man could be happy here. I had thought to be happy here; had fancied I could feel how bright the world is for the care-free. Just once, after fifty years of writing and ciphering, chaffering and trading, to enjoy a few untroubled days. Once only, just once, before falling asleep. When a man is sixty-five, death has already tapped him on the shoulder; money can no longer help him, nor can the doctors. I wanted to draw a few happy breaths before the end; wanted to get some of my own back at last. My father used to say: 'Pleasure is not for our sort. We must carry our packs to the edge of the grave.' Yesterday, it seemed to me that he was wrong, that I was going to have a taste of pleasure after all. Yesterday, I think I was happy,

delighting in my beautiful daughter, rejoicing in her joy. But to-day, God has snatched this pleasure from me, has punished me. . . . It is all over. I can no longer speak to my own child, am ashamed to look her in the face. I shall always be thinking about it, at home, in the office, and in bed at night; shall be wondering where she is, where she has been, what she has been doing. Never again shall I enjoy meeting her when I come home; when she jumps up to greet me; when I looked at her, so young and so beautiful. When she kisses me, I shall always be asking myself who was the last to kiss those lips. I shall be racked with anxiety when she is away from me, shall feel ashamed when I look into her eyes. Life on those terms is impossible. Life on those terms is impossible."

The old man muttered to himself as he walked to and fro, swaying like a drunken man. Again and again he stared across the lake, while tears fell into his beard. He had to take off his eye-glasses, and as he stood there awkwardly in the narrow path, his eyes streaming, he made such a queer figure that a gardener's lad who passed by gaped at him in amazement, guffawed, and made some rude remarks in Italian. This brought Salomonsohn to his senses. Of course he was making himself too conspicuous. He would seek a bench in a more retired spot, where he could be alone with his sorrows for a while.

Hardly had he found the place he wanted, when he was startled by the sound of laughter—familiar tones, which now racked his heart. For nineteen years this merry laughter had been music to him. It was for the sake of this laughter that he had so often made wearisome journeys into Posen and Hungary, travelling third class and by night, to win more of the golden earth in which the girl's untroubled gaiety could blossom. It was for the sake of this laughter that he had ruined his health

—only that he might be sure of hearing the ripple of mirth from those beloved lips. Now the sound of it had become horrible to him, and stabbed him to the heart.

Yet, in spite of himself, it lured him to look at her as she laughed. She was standing on the tennis court, spinning her racket between her fingers, and amusing herself by throwing it high in the air and catching it as it fell. While she did this, she laughed gleefully. Three men were admiringly watching her antics: Count Ubaldi in flannels; the officer in his well-fitting uniform; and the gentleman jockey in smart riding-breeches. The old man, too, stared entranced as she sported like a butterfly. God! How pretty she was in her short skirt, the sunlight glinting in her fair hair! How lovely her youthful limbs in their light and easy movements, both intoxicated and intoxicating! Now, in quick succession, she threw three tennis balls into the air, and it was wonderful to watch the willowy poise of her body as she moved swiftly to catch them in their fall. Her father had never seen her like this before. She was, as it were, a living flame, a virgin goddess, that had taken shape amid the ivy of this southern garden, or risen out of the blue waters of the lake. Never, during her days at home, had she displayed such wild exuberance of spirits. At home, she had been attuned to the dullness of her surroundings, had never been thus filled with ecstasy, had never looked so superlatively beautiful. Such were her father's thoughts as he watched her. For a moment he forgot the terrible experience of the early morning, and could see nothing but the leaping flame. Then, when she caught the last of the three balls, and, laughingly but breathlessly, hugged it to her bosom, the three young men who were looking on clapped their hands and shouted, "Brava, brava!" Their voices roused him from his trance. He looked at them furiously.

"There they are, the wretches," he thought. "There

they are. Which of them is it? Which of the three? How they are dressed up to the nines, these idlers! Clean-shaven, scented . . . People of my sort have to slave in offices, to sit at their desks in patched clothes, or wear their shoes out hunting up customers. Maybe, these fellows' fathers are slaving like that too. Young men nowadays take their ease, go wherever fancy takes them, idle away their days, have smooth faces and bold eyes. It is not difficult for such as they to make a fine show in the world, and to look so alluring that they need only beckon to a frivolous girl. Which of them can it be? One of them, I know, must be licking his lips as he looks at her, as he remembers last night, and thinks of the night which is to come. If only I could flog him to death like a dog!"

Meanwhile, the four on the lawn had caught sight of him. The girl waved her racket to him with a laugh, and the young men bade him good morning. He made no acknowledgment, but silently glowered at his daughter.

"Yes, you can still laugh, you shameless huzzy! No doubt one of those three men is laughing to himself, as he looks at me; chuckles, and says to himself: 'That silly old Jew there, who snores so peacefully at night; if the old fool only knew!' But I do know! You laugh; you look on me as dirt beneath your feet. My daughter, that's another story. She is a pretty girl, fashionably dressed; you need only lift your finger, and she runs to you. The mother, too: she's no chicken now; of course she makes up a little; but she's comely still, not too old to amuse herself, and no doubt with a little courting . . . Who can blame you, you curs? Who can blame you, when they are only too ready to give themselves to you? What does it matter to you that you should break an old man's heart? What does it matter to the women either, those shameless women? All that any of you want is to enjoy

yourselves. Shooting is too good for men like you. You should be whipped to death. Still, who can blame you? So long as no one takes vengeance on you, so long as men like me feed on their own anger as a dog returns to its vomit . . . I have no right to blame you, so long as I play the coward, the pitiful coward; so long as I do not drag the girl away from you; so long as I stand looking on and saying never a word—coward, coward, coward!”

Shaken by his wrath, he leaned against the bench for support. Then, suddenly, he turned, and fled from the garden, stumbling as he went.

Salomonsohn made his way into the little town. There he stopped to look in at a shop window, where all kind of tourist articles were exposed for sale: shirts and nets, blouses and fishing tackle, neckties and books, miscellaneous confectionery. His eyes rested upon one object in the medley; a gnarled stick, with a spiked ferule for mountain climbing, heavy, a formidable weapon.

“Strike the dog down!” The thought whirled through his mind, almost pleasurably, it drove him into the shop, where he bought the stick. Directly his fingers closed on it, he felt stronger, as weaklings always feel when they have a weapon in hand. His muscles grew tense as he gripped it.

“Strike the dog down!” Again he murmured the words. Unconsciously his gait became firmer, and he walked more quickly. Now he was wellnigh running as he returned by the lakeside road, panting more from anger than from speed.

Clenching this weapon, he came into the cool and dimly lighted entrance hall, to look round eagerly for his opponent. There they were, in the corner, seated in wicker chairs, drinking whiskies and sodas through straws, idling away their time in lively conversation: his wife, his daughter, and the ubiquitous three.

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"Which is it? Which is it?" He fingered the heavy stick. "One of them must have his brains dashed out! But which, which?"

Misled by his questing gaze, Erna jumped up to meet him.

"Here you are at last, Dad. We've been looking for you everywhere. Just fancy! Herr von Medwitz is going to take us for a drive in his Fiat, right along the lake to Desenzano."

She motioned him gently towards the table, expecting him to say a word of appreciation.

The three rose to shake hands with him. Old Salomonsohn trembled. The girl had taken his left arm, and the light pressure of her fingers exercised a soothing influence. As if in a dream, he shook hands with the three young men, sat down glumly, took a cigar from his case, and viciously bit off the end. The conversation, interrupted for a moment by his arrival, resumed its lively flow in the French tongue.

The old man sat in dumb misery, crumpled up, chewing the end of his cigar until the brown tobacco juice trickled down over his teeth.

"Who can blame them? Who can blame them," he mused. "It is I who am beneath contempt. I have just shaken hands with all three of them, though I am certain that one of them is the villain. I am seated at the same table with him; yet I do not strike him down; I give him my hand politely! Who can blame them for laughing at me? Why should they not go on talking as if I were not here, as if I were dead and buried—though Erna and her mother know that I don't understand French? They both know it perfectly well, and yet neither say a word to me to keep up appearances at least, were it only that I need not look such a fool, such an absolute fool. I'm a mere nothing to them; or a tiresome appendage, a nuisance; something of which they

are ashamed, and of which they would rid themselves but for the fact that it earns money for them. Money, money, this foul and miserable money with which I have corrupted them; this money upon which God's curse lies! Neither my wife nor my child has a word to fling to me; they have eyes only for these drones, for these smooth-tongued, dandified coxcombs. See how they are giggling as if the men were actually tickling them! Meanwhile, I sit here putting up with it all; listening to their laughter without understanding a word. I sit here, instead of using my fists to the men, instead of driving them away with my stick before they begin to take liberties under my very eyes. I bear it all, sit here in silence, doing nothing—because I am a coward, a coward, a coward!"

"Allow me!" The Italian officer broke in upon Salomonsohn's thoughts, offering him a light, in carefully phrased German.

The old man started violently, and stared fiercely at the unsuspecting speaker. Anger flamed up within him, and for a moment he gripped his stick. Then his hand relaxed, and his mouth was distorted in a malevolent grin as he replied:

"Oh yes, I allow you." The words came in a cutting tone. "I allow you; allow you to do anything you like," he sniggered. "Everything I have is at your disposal. You can allow yourself any liberties you please with me and mine."

The Italian officer was taken aback. His knowledge of German was scanty, and he had not understood the words. But the expression on the old man's face conveyed a plain message. Medwitz, startled, jumped to his feet; the two women turned pale; there was a tense pause like that between a flash of lightning and the clap of thunder. Then the tension passed. The stick fell from Salomonsohn's nerveless fingers. He shrank into himself

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like a whipped cur, hemmed and hawed in his embarrassment, was alarmed at his own boldness. Erna hastened to resume the conversation as if nothing had happened; Baron Medwitz played up to her with an assumption of cheerful unconcern; within a few minutes it seemed as if the incident had been forgotten.

The old man sat aloof, eyelids lowered; he might have been dozing. No one took any further notice of him. The waves of light conversation rolled over his silence. From time to time there were outbursts of joyous laughter while he sat there in hopeless misery and shame.

The three men stood up; so did Erna, briskly, and her mother more sedately. One of them had proposed an adjournment to the music room, and the idea had been accepted with acclamation. It did not enter their heads to extend a special invitation to the old man, who was apparently asleep in his chair. He was recalled to himself by the sudden stillness, just as at night a sleeper is awakened by a feeling of cold when the bed-clothes have slipped off. His eyes fell on the empty chairs; and even as he looked, there came from the neighbouring room the rattling strains of jazz music, intermingled with laughter and lively exclamations. So they were dancing there! Dancing, dancing, always dancing! Inflaming their blood again and again, rubbing up against one another wantonly. Dancing at eventide, in the middle of the night, and now in broad day! These loafers. Dancing was the bait with which they lured women.

Rancorously, he picked up his heavy stick, and shuffled along after them. At the door, he stopped to look at them. Medwitz, the gentleman jockey, was seated at the piano, playing noisily, half turned on the stool, so that he could look at the dancers while he strummed. Erna was dancing with the officer. Her mother, heavy of foot, was being laboriously put through her paces by Count

Ubaldi—that lamp-post 'of a man! Salomonsohn had eyes only for Erna and her partner. The sleek hound was pawing her shoulder, as if she belonged to him. And Erna, Erna was pressing up against him, with barely restrained passion. Yes, that must be the man! The intimacy was plainly disclosed by the movement of their bodies, by the ardour that betrayed the secret of their previous embraces. That must be the man. The father could read it in their eyes which, half closed but exultant, were radiant with the memories of recent delights. The thief who now clasped her in the dance, had clasped her over night in a yet more ardent embrace! Involuntarily Salomonsohn drew nearer, feeling almost bold enough to drag the girl away from her lover. They paid no heed to him. In her every movement she was swayed by the rhythm of the music, and by the guidance of her partner, her seducer. Her head was bent backwards; her lips were parted; she was intoxicated, swept away by the current of the music, forgetting space and time, regardless of the old man who stood there trembling and panting, as, with bloodshot eyes, he glared at her in a frenzy of rage. She was aware only of herself, of the entrancing motion of her own young limbs as they responded to the stimulus of the whirling music. She was aware of nothing but herself, and that a man whose breath fanned her cheek was coveting her, that his strong arm clasped her, and that she must stand guard over her impulses lest she should yield to her own burning desire for self-surrender. This was all revealed to Salomonsohn by the tumult in his own veins. Always when the dance bore her away from him, he felt as if she were being parted from him for ever.

The music suddenly ceased, and the German baron sprang to his feet.

"*Assez joué pour vous,*" he exclaimed with a laugh. "*Maintenant je veux danser moi-même.*"

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Consent was general and uproarious. The animated pairing of the dance was replaced by an indiscriminate clustering.

The old man came to himself once more. Now was the time to speak, to intervene! No longer would he remain inactive; no longer would he be the superfluous onlooker! His wife passed close by, panting a little from her exertions but brimming over with satisfaction. Anger gave wings to his determination. He placed himself deliberately in her path.

"Come with me," he snapped. "I want to speak to you."

She gazed at him questioningly. There were beads of sweat on his pale forehead, and he looked at her askance. What did he want? Why on earth should he bother her just now? A refusal was already shaping itself on her lips, when she became aware that his demeanour was threatening, and she recalled his formidable outbreak in the lounge a short while ago. Reluctantly, she gave way.

"*Excusez, Messieurs, un instant,*" she said, turning towards the young men.

"She asks them to excuse her," thought Salomonsohn in a fury. "She did not ask me to excuse her when she left me alone in the lounge. They treat me as if I were a dog, a doormat on which they wipe their feet! Who can blame them? Who can blame them—so long as I put up with it?"

As soon as husband and wife were alone, she waited with raised eyebrows. He stood before her like a school-boy before the master, his lips atremble.

"Well," she said at last; "what is it?"

"I won't have it. I . . . I . . . won't have it," he stammered. "I forbid you . . . forbid you to associate with these people."

"What people?" she asked indignantly, pretending she did not understand.

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"That crowd in there," he fumed, nodding his head towards the music room. "I won't have it."

"Why not, if you please?"

"Always this inquisitorial tone," he thought bitterly; "just as if I were her servant." Aloud, he went on: "I have my own reasons, very definite reasons. I won't have it. You must not allow Erna to speak to those men. I can't tell you all I know."

"I shall do as I think best," she answered imperiously. "To my thinking, the three gentlemen are well-bred, very much so, far better society than we are accustomed to at home."

"Better society! These loafers; these . . ." anger choked his utterance. He stamped on the floor, saying once more: "I won't have it! I forbid you! Do you understand?"

"No," she coldly responded, "I don't understand. I cannot see why I should deprive Erna of her pleasures."

"Her pleasures! Her pleasures!" He staggered as if he had been struck; his face grew red; his hand convulsively gripped his stick. Then he mastered his feelings, stepped up closer to her, and spoke imploringly: "You misunderstand me. I want nothing for myself. I ask you only (and it is the first time for years that I have asked anything of you) that we should leave this place instantly. I don't care where we go. Florence, perhaps, or Rome; one place is as good as another. You can choose—so long as we get away from here this very day. I can't bear it any longer."

"To-day?" She puckered her brows, and her tone was utterly unsympathetic. "Leave to-day? What on earth are you talking about? Simply because you find these gentlemen uncongenial. You don't need to associate with them."

He stood there holding up his hands in supplication.

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"I can't bear it, I tell you. I can't bear it. Don't ask me why, but believe me when I tell you that I can't bear it. Just this once, do something to please me. Just this once!"

From the music room came the sound of the piano once more. In spite of herself, she was moved by his appeal. How ridiculous he looked as he stood there, the short, thick-set man, his face flushed as if from an apopleptic fit, his eyes distraught, his tremulous hands uplifted. He was a pitiful object, yet so grotesque that her momentary surge of kindness was checked.

"Quite out of the question," she said with decision. "We have pledged ourselves to this excursion for the afternoon. Nor can we leave to-morrow, seeing that we have taken our rooms here for three weeks. We can't make ourselves ridiculous. I see no reason for leaving, so I shall stay here with Erna. . . ."

"You don't mind my going? Of course I should only interfere with your pleasures if I stayed!"

He cut her short with this sarcasm. He squared his shoulders, his bulky frame was erect for once; his fists were clenched; his temples throbbed. He seemed ready to strike. Suddenly he turned on his heel, strode to the staircase, and hastened upstairs as though the devil himself were behind him.

Salomonsohn raced up the stairs. His one object was to get quickly to his own room, where he would be able to master his anger, and would be safe from doing anything foolish. Just as he reached the upper story he was seized with a violent pain, and, deadly pale, had to lean against the wall for support. How agonizing it was! He set his teeth, lest he should scream.

He knew well enough what it was; gall-stone colic, one of those terrible paroxysms he had often had of late—though never before such a martyrdom as this.

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"No excitement," the doctor had said. The words recurred to him now, amid the pain.

"No excitement!" he repeated grimly. "An easy thing to say! But how can I avoid excitement when . . . Oh! Oh!"

He winced, and could scarcely forbear from screaming at the intensity of the pain. He dragged himself along to his private sitting-room, and collapsed on to the couch, burying his teeth in one of the cushions. As soon as he lay down, the pain began to abate.

"I ought to have a poultice," he reminded himself; "and take my drops, then I'd soon be all right again."

But the medicine was in his bedroom, and there was no one at hand to fetch it for him. He had not the strength to go for it himself, or even to get across the sitting-room and ring the bell.

"No one to help me! I shall die alone in one of these attacks. There must be something more amiss than gall-stones. These are the pains of imminent death. My days are over. No specialists, no health resorts, are of any use to me, now. Death is gnawing at my vitals. Even if a few years of life remain, they will not really be life, but only a living death. After all, when have I had any real life? Life lived for myself . . . What has life been for me? Money grubbing, nothing else. Getting money for others; and what use is the money to me now? I took to myself a wife. She came to me as a maiden, and she bore me a daughter. Year after year we breathed the same air, lying beside one another in bed. What has happened to her now? I can hardly recognize her face. I do not know her voice. She talks to me as if I were a stranger, and never gives a thought to all that I feel and suffer and think. Year by year she has become more estranged from me. I have a daughter, too, flesh of my flesh. When she was born, I thought: 'Here begins a new life for me; brighter and happier than the life of

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my own body has been. Now I shall not wholly die.' My daughter! At night she throws herself into a stranger's arms. . . . I shall die alone, as I have lived alone. For the others, I am as good as dead already! God! God! Never have I been so hopelessly alone."

The bodily pain was worse and better by turns. The mental pain knew no remission. His thoughts were more pitiless than any gall-stones could be. If only he could stop thinking! He had torn open his coat and waistcoat, and, as he lay there, his distended belly quivered under the shirt. Cautiously, he pressed the painful spot.

"Nothing is left of me but this place which hurts. I own nothing in the world but my illness, my death. Wife and child and home and business—these are nothing to me now. The only real thing is this thing beneath my fingers where it hurts. All the rest is folly, is vanity, is unmeaning. What hurts, hurts no one but me. My cares trouble no one but me. Erna and her mother no longer understand me, and I no longer understand them. Lonely, how lonely is a man's life! Never before has this been brought home to me so fully. Now, when I am lying alone here, and when death is waiting for me, when I am sixty-five years old and the end is close at hand, and when these womenfolk of mine are dancing or wantoning, I realize at length that I have lived only for them, who give me no thanks for it; realize that never, even for an hour, have I lived for myself. Why should I give them a thought, seeing that they do not give me a thought? Better to die than to ask them for sympathy! What have I to do with them, now?"

By degrees the pain grew easier. The hand that had seemed to be twisting his vitals was relaxing its grip. A dull discomfort persisted, though no longer acute enough to be called pain. Something still gnawed within, though sensation was blunted. He lay with his eyes closed, taking note of this unceasing discomfort. What had been

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a weapon piercing him was no longer so sharp ; yet it was still at work. Slowly, very slowly, it was making an end of him. The whole current of his life, everything that he had loved, was being absorbed into this consuming fire, was smouldering, and would soon be nothing more than a charred remnant of indifference. What was happening to him, as he lay so still, passionately reminiscent of his life? An end? Something was about to end. What was it? His thoughts turned inward questioningly.

Gradually, by slow degrees, began the failure of his heart.

His eyes closed, the old man lay in the twilight room. He was half awake, but was sinking into the realm of dreams. In the confusion of his senses betwixt sleep and waking, it seemed to him as if somewhere within (from a wound which no longer hurt and which he had received without knowing it) something warm and moist was trickling—as if he were bleeding to death inwardly. This invisible flow was not painful ; the current was gentle and almost imperceptible. Slowly, drop by drop, like warm tears, came the stream ; and each drop fell into his heart. Tonelessly, silently, this hidden heart was sucking up the strange current. This heart sucked it up like a sponge, grew heavier and heavier, swelling up within the narrow chamber of his chest. Filled, and overfilled, the heart, so he fancied, was slowly dragging downwards, straining the ligaments, tearing the muscles, heavily labouring, huge now in size, dragging downwards by its own weight. At length (ah, how it hurt !) it dragged itself away from its attachments, and began to sink. Slowly, slowly, without violence, it loosed itself from the fibres of the flesh ; very slowly, not like a stone, not like a falling fruit ; no ! like a sponge, saturated with moisture, it sank deeper, ever deeper, down into a warm vacancy, down somewhere into a realm of non-existence, outside himself, a

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broad and endless night. Of a sudden it became terribly still in the place where this warm and throbbing heart had been; emptiness yawned there, sinister and chill. No more beating, no more dripping; all was motionless and dead within. Black and empty like a coffin, his shuddering breast arched itself around this incomprehensible nonentity.

So convincing was the vision betwixt sleep and waking that Salomonsohn, when he came to himself once more, involuntarily began to finger the left side of his chest, to feel if his heart were still beating there. Yes, God be thanked for it, the dull and rhythmical pulses were still perceptible—and yet he could not chase away the conviction that they were pulses in the void, and that his heart had vanished. For (how strange!) all the connexions between himself and his body had been, as it were, loosened. No pain, now, to trouble him; no reminiscent twitching of tortured nerves. All within was without sensation, as if he had been turned to stone.

“What has happened? Just now I was in agony. Just now I was racked in every fibre. What has happened to me?”

He explored his inner man once more, in quest of the sensations of his vision. They had vanished! Nothing was left of them! Nothing hurt; nothing flowed. This bodily inner man of his must be as empty as a shell of a tree whose inward substance has been destroyed by fire. Surely he must be dead already, or dead in part? This body must be the body of a corpse. He feared to touch it with his warm and living hand.

With his attention thus concentrated on the lack of inward sensations, the old man paid no heed to the passing of the hours, did not hear the recurrent striking of the church clock as the tones resounded across the lake and made their way in through the window. Night had

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fallen, and the square of the window had been merged in the general blackness. He did not see the coming of the darkness, having eyes only for the darkness within, and ears only for the inward silence which was like the silence of the tomb.

At length he was recalled to the outer world. He heard merry laughter in the next room, from which a ray of light streamed in, for the door was ajar.

"My wife! Erna!" Salomonsohn started. "In a moment they will find me on this sofa, and will ask me tiresome questions."

Hastily, he buttoned up his waistcoat and coat. He need not mention his attack to them. What concern was it of theirs?

But neither his wife nor Erna came into the room. They were in a hurry. The dinner gong was booming for the third time. They were changing with all possible speed; through the half-open door he could measure their progress. He heard them opening drawers; heard their rings clinking as they laid them on the wash-stand; heard their shoes drop on the floor. Meanwhile they were talking to one another; he could hear every word. At first they spoke merrily about their excursion, and about their companions on the outing; trivial chatter in the interstices of the toilet. Then came a reference to himself.

"What on earth's become of Dad?" asked Erna wonderingly, thinking of him rather late in the day.

"I'm sure I don't know," answered the mother snappishly, irritated by the mere mention of him. "I expect he's down in the hall reading for the hundredth time the money-market news in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. That's the only thing that interests him. I don't believe he's ever looked at the lake! He doesn't like the place; told me so before lunch. He wanted us all to go away to-day."

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"Go away to-day? Why?"

"How can I tell? I never understand what he wants, or why. He does not like the company here. The gentlemen are obviously not to his taste; and I dare say he feels that he is not to theirs. It's really disgraceful the way he goes about with his clothes all rumpled and his collar unfastened. I wish you'd speak to him; ask him to tidy himself up a little, in the evenings at least. He pays heed to what you say. Wasn't it awful this morning? I thought I should sink into the ground with shame when he flared out at the lieutenant just because the poor man offered him a light!"

"Yes, Mama, what was the matter with him? I meant to ask you before. I've never seen Dad like that, and I was really frightened."

"Oh, nothing but a fit of temper. I suppose the exchange has gone against him! But perhaps it was because we were speaking French. It always upsets him when others are enjoying themselves. I don't think you noticed how he glowered at us when we were dancing, standing at the door like a murderer behind a tree, waiting to begin. Go away! Leave instantly! Simply because the fancy takes him! Even if he does not like the place, he might at least let us enjoy ourselves in our own way. Anyhow, I don't bother about his fancies, no matter what he says or does."

That was the end of the conversation. They had finished dressing. He heard the door into the passage open. The light was switched off.

He lay very still. Though he had heard every word, he was unruffled. The machinery of anger seemed to have run down with the rest. Tranquilly he got up, went slowly and cautiously down the stairs, and seated himself at their table as if they had been strangers.

He said not a word to them that evening; though

neither of them seemed to notice the silence which was like a clenched fist. Without a good-night, he left them, went upstairs to bed, switched off the light. It was a long while before his wife came, in cheerful mood after a lively conversation. Believing him to be asleep, she undressed in the dark. Soon, from the rhythmical breathing, he knew she was asleep.

Thus left to himself once more, the old man stared open-eyed into the boundless vacancy of the night. Near him in the darkness lay something, someone, breathing heavily. He found it hard to persuade himself that this body, sharing his room and breathing the same air as himself, was the body he had known young and ardent, the body which had borne him a daughter, the body with which he had been connected by the deepest mystery of the flesh. From time to time he forced himself to remember that this warm, soft body which he could touch if he chose to stretch out his hand, had once been a part of his very life. Strangely enough, however, the memory no longer aroused any feeling. He listened to his wife's breathing as indifferently as he listened to the rhythmical sound that came in through the open window, the murmur of the ripples on the shore. The one, like the other, was remote and unessential. His wife no longer had part or lot in his existence.

Once, indeed, he started at a gentle and furtive sound, the opening of the door of Erna's bedroom.

"Again to-night!"

The thought came like a stab in the heart he had believed to be dead. The nerves could still feel a little. They were dying, but their end had not yet come. Soon the pang was over.

"Let her do what she likes! What does it matter to me?"

Relaxing tension, he lay back. The cool, blue dark-

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ness enveloped him, invaded all his senses. Soon he slumbered. •

When his wife awoke in the morning, he was already dressed, in hat and overcoat.

"What are you doing? Going out? It's early!" She spoke drowsily.

He did not turn towards her, but went on unconcernedly packing his valise.

"Don't you remember? I'm going home. I am taking a few necessities with me. You can send the rest after me."

His wife was alarmed. What could be the matter with him? She had never heard him speak in such a tone before, so coldly, clearly, and decisively. She sat up, and swung her legs out of bed.

"You can't go away alone like this. Wait a little, and we will come with you. I have already spoken to Erna about it."

He shook his head.

"No, no; don't bother."

Without looking round, he made for the door. In order to turn the handle, he had to put down the valise for a moment. As he did so, memories rushed back into his mind. How many thousand times had he put down his box of samples in this way when leaving a stranger's room, before departing with a servile bow, and the expression of a hope for further orders? But in this case there was no business to be done, so he left without a greeting. Making no sign, saying not a word, he picked up the valise, passed through the door, and closed it behind him, shutting it upon his past life.

Mother and daughter were unable to understand what had happened. The brusqueness and resolution of his departure made them uneasy. They hastened to write

to him. The letters they directed to their home in southern Germany were almost affectionate. They asked anxiously whether he had had a comfortable journey, and whether he had got back safely. They declared their readiness to come home whenever he liked. He did not answer. They wrote more urgently; then they wired. Still no answer. When, in one of the letters, they said they needed money, the sum asked for came by return—a post-office order, dispatched from the office with a typewritten covering letter from the firm. No personal greeting!

This enigmatical behaviour hastened their homecoming. Although they had wired to announce the time of their arrival, there was no one to meet them at the station, and on reaching home they found that no preparations had been made. The servants said that the master had left the telegram on the table without giving any orders. In the evening, when they were at supper, they heard the front door open. They jumped up, and ran out into the hall. Old Salomonsohn stared at them in amazement, having obviously forgotten their wire. With no sign of feeling, he allowed his daughter to embrace him, went with the two women into the dining-room, and let them tell him their adventures. He asked no questions; sat silently pulling at his cigar; answered in monosyllables; and paid little heed to what they were saying. He might have been a sleep-walker. Then he got up heavily and went to his room.

Matters went on like this for several days. Vainly did his wife, very much perturbed, try to thrash matters out with him. The more energetic her onslaughts, the more stubborn was his silence. The doors were bolted and barred; he was inaccessible; the passages had been walled up. He continued to eat at the same table with them. When there were guests, he would sit there buried in his own thoughts. He took no part in the life

of the household. Any visitor who, in the course of conversation, chanced to look him in the eyes had a painful experience, for Salomonsohn gazed through the other as if no one were there.

Even the most casual acquaintances could not fail to notice the old man's growing strangeness. The friends began to nudge one another when they met him in the street. Salomonsohn was one of the wealthiest men in the town, but he crept along beside the wall as though he were a beggar, his hat awry and out of shape, his coat soiled with tobacco ash. He tottered as he walked, and muttered to himself. When any one greeted him, he looked askance; and when a passer-by tried to enter into conversation, he stared vacantly at the speaker and forgot to shake hands. At first people thought he must be deaf and they repeated their words in a louder tone. The real trouble was that it took time to arouse him from his self-centred meditations; and even when he engaged in conversation, he would speedily relapse into abstraction. When this happened, the light died out of his eyes; he would turn away, and resume his faltering progress, unaware of his interlocutor's surprise. He was wholly self-absorbed, and other human beings had ceased to exist for him. He never asked after any one's health. At home, he failed to notice his wife's dull despair, and his daughter's hopeless perplexity. He did not read the newspaper, and did not listen to what others were saying. Not for a moment could ideas from outside make their way through the gloomy barrier of indifference. He was estranged even from what had been the very centre of his world. He went to the office for a time, seated himself at his desk, apparently waiting to put his signature to letters. But when his secretary left a pile of unsigned letters ready to his hand, and came back an hour later, he would find Salomonsohn staring into vacancy across the unread documents. In the end, he

realized that his coming was superfluous, and he stayed away entirely.

What surprised the whole town more than anything was this. Salomonsohn, who had never been famed for strictness in religious observances, had now turned pious. Though he was indifferent to all other matters, broke his appointments, and was late at meals, he never failed to turn up punctually at the synagogue. Robed in his talith and wearing a black silk cap, he stood always in the same spot, the one where his father had stood before him, swaying rhythmically in time with the chants. In this sparsely frequented place, where the unfamiliar words came droningly to his ears, he was most effectively alone. A sort of peace took possession of his mind, mastering the dull confusion that usually prevailed. When prayers for the dead were being intoned, when the friends and relatives of the departed were performing their sad duty, repeatedly bowing, and imploring God's mercy for the deceased, the old man's eyes would grow dim with tears. He was the last of his line. No one would say a prayer for him when he was gone. That was why he now prayed so devoutly, thinking of himself as a dead man.

Late one evening, when he was on his way home from an aimless wandering, it began to rain heavily. As usual, he had forgotten to take his umbrella. For a very small outlay he could have driven home in a cab. There were porches and awnings offering shelter. But he walked on unheeding through the downpour. A pool of water collected in the top of his misshapen hat; streams dripped from his drenched sleeves. He held on his way, the only pedestrian in the deserted street. He was wet to the skin, and looked more like a tramp than the master of a fine villa when he reached the door of his house. At this moment, a motor with glaring lights pulled up, splashing him with liquid mud. The door of the car opened, and from the interior a gentleman stepped out hastily and put

up an umbrella to protect a lady, who followed with a second man. It was Salomonsohn's wife. Startled at encountering her husband at this moment and in such guise, she involuntarily turned away her eyes. The old man was quick to understand; she was ashamed of him in the presence of her guests. Tranquilly, and without any sense of bitterness, wishing to spare her the discomfort of having to introduce him, he walked on a few steps to the servants' entrance, by which he humbly made his way into the house.

Thenceforward he continued to use the servants' entrance, where he could be sure of not meeting any of his wife's friends. He gave no trouble there, and no one troubled him. He stayed away from the dining-room. An elderly maid-servant brought him his meals in his own room. If his wife or Erna tried to join him there, his embarrassed but invincible antipathy made it impossible for them to persist. At length they decided to leave him to himself, to ignore him, as he ignored everything and everybody. Through the walls he could hear the sound of laughter and music in the rooms he no longer entered, could hear the coming and going of carriages and cars far on into the night. So apathetic was he, that he never looked out of the window. What concern were they of his, these comings and goings? Only the dog came upstairs from time to time and lay down beside the forgotten man's bed.

In the dead heart, there was no longer a capacity for suffering, but in the man's body the black mole was burrowing, tearing its way through the quivering flesh. From week to week, the attacks became more frequent; and when his doctors at length proposed an exploratory operation, he made no demur. The specialist, wishing to soften the blow, said that "perhaps" the time had come for operation. Salomonsohn was not alarmed. He only

smiled cheerlessly. Thank God, the end was near! Dying would soon be over. Death, the comforter, was at hand. He forbade the medical men to tell Erna or her mother what was impending, fixed the day for the operation, and made ready. For the last time, he went to the office, where no one expected him, and where all looked upon him as a stranger. Once more he seated himself on the leather-covered high stool he had used for thirty years. Having written a cheque, he took it to the presiding elder of the synagogue, who was astonished at the figure. After providing for his funeral and his tombstone, the money was to be spent in works of charity. He left hastily, to escape outpourings of gratitude, dropped his hat as he stumbled away, and did not trouble to pick it up. Bare-headed, with gloomy eyes and jaundiced face, he made his way to the cemetery in order to visit his parents' grave. Some idlers watched him curiously as he talked for a long time to the weather-beaten tombstones, apostrophizing them as though they were human beings. Was he paying his respects to them, or was he asking their blessing? No one could hear the words, but his lips could be seen moving, and his head was bowed in prayer. At the cemetery gate, the beggars thronged round him, for he was well known to every one. He searched his pockets for coins and notes, and had distributed all his ready cash, when an old crone came hobbling up and whined for alms. He turned out his pockets once more, but there was nothing left. Then the pressure of something hard and heavy on one of his fingers riveted his attention. A thought struck him. He drew off his wedding ring and bestowed it upon the beggar woman. Thus stripped of all his personal belongings and utterly alone did the old man go to place himself under the knife.

When he came to from the anæsthetic, the doctors, who

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knew his condition to be desperate, summoned his wife and daughter. He opened his eyes laboriously.

"Where am I?" he said, staring at the white walls.

Erna bent affectionately over him. The light of recognition beamed in his eyes. It was his beloved daughter! His lips began to shape themselves into a kindly smile. Greatly moved by this token of joy, which had so long been absent, she stooped lower to kiss her father's cheek.

Who can say what recalled the memory of all that had estranged him from her? Perhaps the scent she used had aroused an association in his benumbed brain. A sudden and dreadful change came over his features. His pale lips were now set in an expression of fierce hostility. His hand beneath the coverlet was working convulsively to free itself, as if to push away something hateful. His wounded body quivered with excitement.

"Away! Away!" The syllables were barely articulate, but unmistakable. So fierce was the enmity shown by the dying man, that the doctor hastily motioned the women from the room.

"Mr. Salomonsohn is delirious," he whispered. "You had better leave him to himself."

As soon as they had gone, an expression of drowsy calm replaced that of anger. The dying man breathed quietly for a time, and then the death-rattle began. He no longer had strength to draw the sorrowful breath of life. In a few minutes, the shattered heart had failed.

EPISODE IN THE EARLY LIFE OF PRIVY COUNCILLOR D.



IT was a kindly thought of my pupils and my colleagues. Their presentation copy of the book lies there in its handsome binding. They brought it to me to-day on my sixtieth birthday, which is also the thirtieth anniversary of my appointment as professor. It is an elaborate bibliography, as well as a biography. Everything is there: the most unimportant essays, the commemorative speeches, brief reviews in the year books of learned societies—all have been disinterred from their paper tombs. Nothing has been forgotten. My whole career is set forth, displayed step by step, like a staircase leading up to the present hour. I should indeed be ungrateful were I not delighted at so touching an evidence of thoroughness. Many details which for me had passed into oblivion have been resuscitated and fitted into their place in the picture. I must admit that I, an elderly man, feel the same glow of pride when I look at the presentation copy as I felt in my student days the first time one of my teachers gave me a testimonial declaring my competence and my zeal for knowledge.

Nevertheless, I could not but smile as I fluttered the two hundred pages, and contemplated my portrait there set forth. Was this really my life? Had it moved in such smooth and purposive serpentines from the first hour down to the present? I had exactly the same feeling as when I first heard my own voice coming from a gramophone. My own voice, of course, but only my voice as

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others heard it, and not my voice as I hear it in my own inner self when it is tinged with my own life-blood. Thus once again did I (who have spent the greater part of my days in portraying men as they disclose themselves in their works, and in trying to make the intellectual structure of their world substantially realizable) learn from my own experience how inaccessible in every one of us is the essential core, the plastic cell out of which the impetus to growth proceeds. We live through myriads of seconds, but there is only one second among all these myriads which brings our whole inner world to the boil; the second in which, as Stendhal described, there suddenly takes place a crystallization in the supersaturated blood; a magical second like that of procreation, and, like it, hidden in the warm interior of one's own body, invisible, intangible, impalpable, a unique experience of mystery. No algebra of the soul can calculate it; no alchemy can divine it. Usually, even for ourselves, it remains unsearchable.

This book which has been brought to me as a birthday gift contains no inkling of that mysterious core of my spiritual development. That is why I smile as I turn its pages. Everything in it is true, and yet the essence is lacking. It describes me, but does not express me. It talks of me, but does not disclose me. The painstaking index contains two hundred names: but it does not contain the name of the one man who imparted to my life its creative impulse; who decided my fate for me; and who now, with renewed energy, summons me back into my youth. All are spoken of, except the man who gave me the power of speech, the man whose breath animates my words. It suddenly comes home to me that this silence is cowardly. For a lifetime I have been penning men's likenesses. Great figures from past centuries have been resurrected by me, and thus made alive for my contemporaries. But I have never done this service for

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the man who was more real to me than any other. To this man, to this beloved shade, I will, as in the days of the Homeric heroes, give to drink of my own blood, that he may speak to me once again, and that he, who long since grew old and passed away, may speak once more to me who am growing old in my turn. I will add some pages, dealing with matters previously hidden, will add them to this account of what is publicly known; will lay a confession of feeling beside the learned volume which is a history of my thought-life; and for his sake will tell to myself the true story of my own youth.

Again, before I begin, I flutter the pages of this book which professes to describe my life. Again, I cannot help but laugh. How can they expect to reach the true inwardness of my existence when they make a false start? An old schoolfellow (who, like myself, is now a privy councillor) declares that in those early days I was distinguished among all the other boys by my passionate zeal for knowledge. Your memory plays you false, old friend! For me in early youth, the humanities were distasteful. Only under compulsion did I study them, secretly gnashing my teeth the while. My father was a schoolmaster in a little North German town, and for the very reason that at home culture was a means of livelihood, I detested learning and literature from childhood onwards. That is nature's way. In pursuance of her mysterious design to safeguard the creative faculty, she is apt to make children scorn their father's bent. She does not want to encourage an easy, effortless acceptance of a heritage, a mere handing down of acquisitions from one generation to the next. She sows the seeds of discord, and will only allow children to follow in their parents' footsteps after they have made laborious but fruitful detours. It was enough for me that my father should be a votary of knowledge—enough to convince

me that what he called knowledge was a mere juggling with concepts. Because he took the classics as models, the ancient worthies seemed to me dry as dust and odious. Surrounded by books, I despised books. Urged on by my father towards intellectual pursuits, I rebelled against every kind of traditional culture. Such being my mental outlook, it is not surprising that, having matriculated with difficulty and without distinction, I should then have set my face against any continuation of my studies. I wanted to become an officer, or to go to sea, or to take up engineering. Yet I had no real call towards any of these occupations. It was merely because I disliked the theoretical and didactic aspect of knowledge, that I professed my eagerness to take up a practical career, one of those in which knowledge would be applied. But my father, who had a fanatical veneration for the academic, insisted on my going to the university. All I could induce him to concede was that, instead of studying the classics, I should work at modern subjects, and especially at English. Underlying this compromise was, as far as I was concerned, a hidden thought that a good knowledge of the tongue of the seafaring race would make it easier for me to adopt a sailor's life.

Nothing, therefore, in this *Curriculum Vitæ* could be more erroneous than the friendly assertion that during my first term in Berlin, thanks to the guidance of meritorious professors, I already acquired the elements of humane letters. I had just become able to indulge my passion for personal liberty, and what did I care about professors or instructors! I did, indeed, pay one visit to the lecture hall, where the fusty atmosphere of the place, the sermonlike monotony and discursiveness of the lecture, bored me so intensely that I found it difficult to keep awake. It was only the school over again, the school from which I had so recently escaped; though the classroom was now dignified with the name of "theatre."

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From the high desk came a ceaseless drone of hair-splitting futilities. I could not but feel as if a stream of fine sand like that in an hour-glass, were running from between the professor's thin lips—so carefully trituated, so equable, was the flow of words from the thick manuscript book he was reading, as they made their way into the stuffy air. In this arena of an archaic and sterile sciolism, there was now revived a feeling I had already had in my school days, an impression that I must have made my way, unawares, into a mortuary of the spirit, where impassive hands were ruthlessly exploring the anatomy of one who had died long since. The feeling was a defensive instinct, and was naturally intensified as soon as I emerged from the lecture hall into the streets of the city, the Berlin of forty years ago which, amazed at its own growth, turgid with a premature virility, was scattering sparks from every corner. How could such a town fail to impose a passionate tempo, accordant with the intoxication of my own virility, the virility of which I had so recently become aware? The town and I had both suddenly shot up out of a Protestant, orderly, and narrow petty-bourgeois respectability; had been prematurely introduced to a wealth of new powers and possibilities. I, a vigorous young fellow, making his entry into manhood, vibrated, just as Berlin vibrated, like a dynamo surging with unrest and impatience. Never have I understood Berlin so well or loved the place so passionately as then, for in me as in that overfull warm honeycomb of humanity, each cell was craving for expansion. Every vigorous youth has the same feeling, and where could vigorous youth secure the discharge of its energies more effectually than in the passionate embraces of this titanic woman, this impatient city that was herself overflowing with energy? She clasped me to her as eagerly as I flung myself into her arms. My newly awakened curiosity hastily explored her body, that was so warm

though builded of stone.. From morning till night, I walked her streets, visited her lakes, stalked through her hiding places. It was like an obsession, the way in which (ignoring the claims of student life) I flung myself into the living adventure of exploration. In these extravagances, I was, after all, only fulfilling a peculiarity of my temperament. From earliest childhood, I had lacked the capacity for being interested in more than one thing at a time, had invariably been monopolized by the desire of the moment. An impetus that seized me was always a ruling impetus, and carried me forward towards an exclusive goal. Even to-day, I am prone to become so ardently involved in a problem, I bite into it so fiercely, that I can think of nothing else until I have its very marrow between my teeth.

In Berlin, therefore, long ago, the sense of freedom took possession of me so mightily that I could not endure the confinement of the lecture room, and even felt cramped in my own quarters. Time seemed wasted unless it were spent in adventures. A raw stripling, fresh from the country, newly released from the halter, I threw up my head proudly in the determination to pass myself off as fully grown. I joined a students' association. Though really of a retiring disposition, I tried to assume a bold, dashing, and somewhat rakish manner. Before I had been a week in town, I was putting on the airs of a townsman to the manner born; and with amazing speed was able, in coffee taverns, to swagger like an old hand. In this phase of manly growth, of course women had to play their part, and I came well off here, for I was a handsome young fellow. I was tall and slender; the bronze of the sea air was still on my cheeks; I was endowed with the easy and graceful movements of an accomplished gymnast. Naturally I shone in comparison with the cage-bred shop assistants, sallow and ill shapen, who were my rivals on Sundays in the dance halls of

Halensee and Hundekühle—which were in those days outside the town. Now it would be a milk-white blonde from Mecklenburg, a servant-maid on her evening out, whom I, hot from the dance, would take to my room for an hour before she returned home; another time it would be a highly strung little Jewess from Posen, a shop girl. Easy prey, most of them, won without a struggle, and speedily passed on to a fellow-student. But in this unexpected ease of conquest, there was a source of intoxicating delight for one who but yesterday had been a timid schoolboy. My boldness grew with my experience of cheap successes, so that I soon came to regard the streets as no more than a hunting ground for such careless adventures. On one of these occasions when, following a pretty girl, I walked along Unter den Linden, and (quite by chance) found myself in front of the university buildings, I could not but laugh at the thought how long it was since I had set foot across that respectable threshold. Sheer arrogance led me to join a young fellow of my own kidney who proposed a visit to the lecture theatre. We merely peeped through the door. How absurd they all looked, those hundred and fifty bowed backs of the students who were reverently harkening to the litany intoned by the grey-bearded professor. I promptly closed the door, leaving the current of his cloudy eloquence to flow over the bodies of his diligent auditors, while my friend and I resumed our agreeable stroll through the sunlit street.

It sometimes seems to me in retrospect that never can any young man have wasted his time more foolishly than did I during those months. I never read a book; never spoke a sensible word; never thought any thought worth the thinking. Instinctively I avoided the society of intelligent people, giving myself up wholly to the charms of new and hitherto forbidden sensations. No doubt a young man's intoxication with the juices of his own body,

his self-destroying tendency to waste his time in senseless pleasures, is characteristic of the newly won liberties of every vigorous youth. My own surrender to the joys of this lottery was so overwhelming that it might well have culminated in disaster had not chance intervened to put an end to the headlong descent.

The chance (to-day I look upon it as a fortunate one) was that my father was summoned by the Ministry of Education to attend a one-day conference of headmasters in Berlin. What could be more natural to a schoolmaster than to seize this opportunity of paying me a surprise visit? The surprise came off to perfection. As happened most evenings, I had company in my room, a girl, of course. It was at a moment when I was by no means prepared to receive another visitor that a knock came to the door of my room, which was reached by a passage curtained off from the kitchen of the house. In the belief that a fellow student was without, I called snappishly:

"Not at home!"

After a brief pause, the visitor knocked again; and then once more, with growing impatience. I angrily drew on my trousers and went to the door to dismiss the intruder. My braces were hanging down my back, my shirt was open at the throat, my feet were bare. I flung the door wide—there stood my father in the dark passage! His outline was unmistakable, though I could see nothing clearly but his spectacles gleaming in the light that came from my room. The angry phrases I had prepared, died away on my lips. For a moment I stood dumbfounded. Then I had, obsequiously, to ask if he would be good enough to wait a few minutes in the kitchen while I tidied my room. Though it was so dark, I was sure that he had realized the situation. This was clear from his silence, from his reserved manner, from his failure to shake hands, from the shocked mien with which

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he moved aside the curtain and went into the kitchen. There, in front of a cooking stove with coffee and carrots steaming on the hob, the old man had to stand for ten minutes, minutes humiliating to us both, till I had made the girl slip into her clothes and had hustled her out through the curtained passage. He could not but hear her footsteps, could not but see the movement of the curtain as she hurried away. Even when she had gone, I had still to set things in order before I could venture to ask him in. Never in my life have I felt so much ashamed as I was when I could at length tell him I was ready to receive him.

My father made a good showing on this disastrous occasion, so that I still look back on his behaviour with gratitude. He has been dead now for many years. When I think of him, it is not from the outlook of the schoolboy who was inclined to despise him as a mere correcting machine, as perpetually censorious, as a pedant to whom the chief of virtues was precision. I have a much more human picture when I recall the way in which the old man, outraged in all his finer feelings and yet keeping his temper under control, followed me silently into the tainted room. He was carrying his hat and gloves, and wanted to put them down somewhere. Then, with a gesture of loathing, he refrained from doing so, obviously unwilling to bring anything of his into needless contact with these surroundings. I offered him a chair. He made no acknowledgment beyond a gesture disowning community with the contents of my room.

After he had stood in chilly silence for a few moments, he took off his spectacles and polished them assiduously (a sign, in him, of embarrassment). Nor did I fail to notice that the old man, when putting on his glasses again, wiped his eyes with the back of his hand. Each of us was ashamed of looking at the other; each of us was tongue-tied. My chief dread was that he would begin a

sermon, an eloquent discourse in a guttural tone of voice, such as, with dislike and contempt, I had often heard him deliver in school. But on this occasion (once more I thank him for it) the old man kept silence, and held his eyes averted. At length he went to the rickety shelf where my books were housed, took some of them down, and examined them. The first glance was enough, for most of them were still uncut.

"Give me your notebooks."

This command was the first thing he had said since entering the room. Tremblingly, I handed them to him, though I knew that the shorthand notes related to one lecture only. Having glanced at the two pages on which there was some writing, and made sure that this was all, he laid the notebooks on the table, calmly. Then, drawing up a chair, he sat down, looked at me gravely, though not angrily, and inquired:

"Well? What do you think of it all? What will come out of it?"

This quiet questioning touched me home. I was on edge. Had he scolded me, I should have flared up. Had he pulled out the pathetic stop, I should have answered him contemptuously. But this circumstantial inquiry broke through my armour of pride. His seriousness demanded seriousness in return. His self-mastery enforced respect. I can scarcely remember what I replied, and I shall not attempt to record the ensuing conversation. In such times of mental shock, there are outbursts of feeling which would sound like bathos if written down in black-and-white. There are words which bear the stamp of truth at the time when they are uttered, but seem overstrained when they are repeated. This was the only frank and genuine conversation I ever had with my father. I did not hesitate to say that I would leave all decisions in his hands. He advised me to break off my associations in Berlin, and to spend the next term at one

of the small provincial universities. He was certain, he said almost consolingly, that in that case I should be eager to make good, and should be successful in the attempt. His confidence touched me profoundly. I felt that all through my boyhood I had done an injustice to the old man whose goodness was hidden behind a barrier of austere formality. I had to bite my lips in my determination to force back the tears. He was in little better case, for he suddenly held out his hand, and, after a tremulous clasp, hastened from the room. I did not venture to follow him, being too much abashed, so I stayed where I was, wiping the blood from my wounded lips.

This was the first great shock which I, now nineteen years of age, had ever experienced. Though not a word of reproach had come from my father, the shock was enough to overthrow the bombastic card-house of manliness, independence, and vaingloriousness I had been living in for the past three months. The challenge that had been given to my powers of will made me resolute enough to renounce trivial pleasures. I was eager to rally my scattered energies for the pursuit of intellectual aims; lusted to show myself serious, sober-minded, disciplined, and strong. With all the ardour of one who assumed the monastic habit, I vowed myself to study; though I was unaware of the lofty intoxication which awaited me in the domain of knowledge and never suspected that in this exalted world of the spirit strange adventures and fearful hazards awaited the impetuous champion.

After consultation with my father, I went next term to a town in Central Germany. It had a great academic reputation, strangely disproportionate to the size of the place, which was nothing more than a small group of houses huddled round the university buildings. Leaving

my baggage at the station, I made my way to my alma mater, to realize at once how far more compacted was the inner circle of university life here than it had been in Berlin. Within a couple of hours, I had inscribed my name and had called on most of the professors. The only one who was not able to see me was the professor of English literature, but I was told that I should find him in the classroom at four that afternoon.

I was as eager now in pursuit of knowledge as I had been recently in its avoidance. I therefore turned up punctually at four o'clock, having passed the interim in a brief survey of the sleepy little town. The beadle showed me the door of the classroom. I knocked. Thinking I heard someone say "Come in," I entered.

But I was mistaken. No one had bidden me enter. What I had heard had been the voice of the professor in animated discourse, addressing a circle of students—twenty or more—in an obviously improvised fashion. Vexed at having entered uninvited, I was about to withdraw. Then it seemed to me that this might cause more disturbance than if I stayed, so I stood near the door, unnoticed as yet by anyone.

The address had grown spontaneously out of a general discussion. This was shown by the attitudes of the speaker and his auditors, who were grouped round him haphazard. He was not lecturing from a platform which set him apart from them, but sat in easy fashion on one of the tables, his legs dangling. He must have suddenly taken command of the conversation, which had now become a monologue, riveting the attention of his hearers. Very soon I myself, forgetting the awkwardness of my appearance on the scene, succumbed to the fascination of his speech. Involuntarily, I drew nearer. I wished not merely to hear what he was saying but to watch his expressive gestures—for from time to time, suiting the action of the word, his hands would rise like

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wings, and then fall gently and rhythmically like those of a conductor. More and more impassioned became the discourse, till the speaker, in his animation, might well have been seated on a galloping horse instead of upon a hard table, might have been hunting his intellectual quarry with lightning metaphors for hounds. I had never heard anyone speak with such contagious enthusiasm. For the first time I fully understood the derivative sense of the term "rapture," the condition in which a man is seized and carried away by the ecstasy of his emotions.

It was new to me to regard speech as ecstasy, to find that passionate discourse could take the form of elemental energy; and the unaccustomed exercised its wonted charm. Without knowing what I did, allured by a force which was stronger than curiosity, like one in a hypnotic trance, I moved forward until I was within the circle of attentive listeners, who, like myself, were too much enthralled to heed anything but what the professor was saying. Standing now within a few inches of the speaker, I was involved in the current of his discourse, whose origin could be inferred from its substance. No doubt one of the students must have described Shakespeare as a meteoric manifestation, and thereupon the professor, under the stimulus of an opposing conviction, had set himself to show that the great English playwright had not appeared like a meteor from another world, but had been the pre-eminent expression, the spiritual outcome of a whole generation, the embodiment of an age deeply stirred with passion. In broad outline, he sketched Shakespeare's England, described that titanic moment which comes unexpectedly in the life of every nation as in the life of every individual, when all the energies are concentrated for a mighty thrust into the eternal process of events. Suddenly, the world had expanded, a new continent had been discovered, what time the oldest

power of the Old World, the papacy, was in imminent danger of collapse. Across the seas—an English preserve, now that the Spanish Armada had been scattered—new possibilities loomed. The world had expanded, and the soul of man would fain expand likewise to fit this larger world, to spread into the uttermost both of good and of evil. Seized with the impulse to expand, the English wished to discover, to conquer, like the conquistadors of Spain. They needed a new speech, a new energy. Between night and morning appeared the speakers of this new speech, the poets, the dramatists, and other men of letters—fifty, a hundred, in a decade—untamed and untameable fellows, utterly different from the court poetasters who had been roaming through arcadian gardens and penning versicles about carefully selected mythological episodes. The newcomers stormed the theatre. They forced their way into the rough arenas which had hitherto been reserved for bear-baiting and similar cruel sports; the trail of blood lies across their writings, their drama is a circus maximus in which the wild beasts of the feelings rend one another savagely. Lionlike are the rages of these passion-tossed hearts. Each tries to outbid the others in savagery and exuberance. Anything and everything may be described. Incest, murder, atrocious crime, the tumult of unrestrained human impulses, celebrate their orgies in these writings. Like the hungry beasts let loose of old into the amphitheatre, so did the passions of the Elizabethan age hurl themselves, roaring and dangerous, into the ring. It is one formidable outburst like the explosion of a petard; but it lasts fifty years, an outrush of blood, an ejaculation, a single prolonged burst of savagery which involves and shakes the whole world. Individual voices can scarcely be heard, individual figures can hardly be seen, in this upheaval of energy. Each catches fire from the others; each of them learns and pilfers from

the others; all try to outdistance their rivals; and yet they are all the spiritual gladiators of a single celebration, unchained slaves, scourged forward by the genius of the hour. He brings them forth from obscure kennels in the purlieu of the town, and others of them from palaces: Ben Jonson, whose grandfather had belonged to the border gentry whilst his stepfather was a master bricklayer; Marlowe, the son of a shoemaker; Massinger, son of a gentleman attached to the household of the Earl of Pembroke; Philip Sidney, whose father was lord deputy of Ireland and lord president of Wales—the swift vortex whirls them all together. One day they are famous, flush of money, admired; next day they are impoverished like Kyd and Heywood, fall down in the street fainting from hunger like Edmund Spenser. They are swashbucklers, whoremongers, play-actors, cheats; but they are poets one and all. Shakespeare is no more than the central figure among them, “the very age and body of the time.” There is no ground, there is no opportunity, for singling him out amid the tumult in which one work so swiftly follows another, in which one passion so stormily rages after another. Then, suddenly and palpitatingly and convulsively as it began, this most splendid eruption of mankind comes to an end; the drama is finished; England is tired out; for a hundred years thereafter the grey and mist-laden waters of the Thames flow silently over the things of the spirit. In one furious onslaught, a whole generation stormed the heights and plumbed the depths of passion. The frenzied soul has boiled over. A period of repose must follow. The Puritans close the theatres and thus close the outlet for impassioned speech; the Bible comes into its own once more, that divine work which has given so human a phrasing to the most ardent confessions of all ages, and in which one fervent race has, once for all, incorporated its experiences for the benefit of mankind.

Then, with a sudden transition, the speaker addressed himself more directly to us :

"Do you understand, now, why I do not begin my course of lectures at the beginning, why I do not start in the historical succession with the Arthurian legends and Chaucer, but, in defiance of all rules, begin with the Elizabethans? Do you understand why the first thing I ask of you is that you should make yourselves intimately acquainted with the Elizabethans, should live yourselves into their eminently living personalities? There is no understanding of the past without personal experience, without reliving it in imagination. A word is nothing unless it has values and an atmosphere, unless you grasp its historical significance. You young fellows, if you wish to master a country or a language, must study it first of all in its supremely beautiful developments, in its vigorous youth, in the expressions of its utmost passion. You must know the language as it is used by the poets, as it is used in works of imagination, by those who create and perfect the native speech; its poesy must have become the blood in your heart and the breath of your life before you begin to anatomize it. That is why I always set out with the study of the gods, for England is Elizabeth, is Shakespeare and the Shakespeareans. All that went before in English literature was but preparatory; all that came afterwards was but a feeble imitation of this one bold leap towards the infinite. But in the works of the Elizabethan age you will find—and you must feel it, young men, must feel it for yourselves—the living youth of the western world. We can know phenomena, we can know human beings, only through the fire that is in them, only through their passions. Spirit issues out of blood, thought out of passion, passion out of enthusiasm. That is why you must begin with a knowledge of Shakespeare and the other great Elizabethans, who will for the first time make you young men

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truly young! Enthusiasm first, diligence afterwards. Shakespeare first, Shakespeare the supreme, Shakespeare the splendid epitome of the world—before you come to a detailed study of the language!"

"Enough for to-day. Good-bye!"

He sprang from the table, and waved his hand imperiously, in abrupt dismissal. The spell which had captured the attention of the closely compacted bundle of students' was broken. Chairs creaked and rattled, tables grated on the floor, deep breaths were drawn audibly, throats were cleared, general conversation began. The dispersal of interest and the confusion of noises showed, by contrast, how potent had been the wizardry of the speaker. Some now crowded round him to thank him or to ask him a question; others exchanged impressions about what he had been saying; none remained impassive, none were uninfluenced by the brusque release of the electrical tension whose effects still lingered in the atmosphere.

For my part, I could not budge, so profoundly had the discourse affected me. Myself of a passionate temperament, able only to understand things thanks to a vigorous impetus of all the senses, I had for the first time in my life been taken captive by a teacher, by a man much older than myself; for the first time in my life I was aware of coming into contact with one before whom it was both duty and pleasure to bow my head. My pulses were throbbing; I felt their rhythm in every limb. At length I moved forward and slowly made my way to the front, that I might see his face—for, strangely enough, while he was speaking, I had hardly noticed his features, which had been for me simply parts of his discourse. Even now, to begin with, I could only make out a dim silhouette. He was standing in front of the twilight window, half turned towards one of the students, his hand resting on the young man's shoulder. His aspect,

as he stood there making this simple gesture, had an intimacy and a charm which I should never have thought possible in a pundit.

Meanwhile, some of the students had noticed me. Not wishing them to regard me as an intruder, I drew still nearer to the professor, waiting for a chance to speak to him. Now I was able to get a clear view of his face. His head recalled that of a Roman bust, with its domed forehead and its great waves of white hair sweeping backwards on either side. Thus the upper part of the head was of a strongly intellectual type, bold and imposing; but below the heavy eyebrows, the face softened, being made almost feminine by the smooth and rounded chin, and by the sensitive mouth and the smiling, tremulous lips. His bodily poise likewise conveyed a twofold impression. The left hand was resting on the table. But "resting" is a misnomer, for closer inspection showed that it was subject to a fine, continuous tremor, and that the fingers (a little too delicate, a little too soft for a man's hand) were tracing small figures on the wood all the time he was talking. Was he restless and uneasy? Had the nervous excitement of his discourse not yet died away? However this may be, there was something contradictory between the vibratory and uncontrolled movements of the hand and the tranquillity that marked the expression of his countenance as he listened to the students.

At length my turn came. I told him my name, introduced myself as a newcomer, and his eyes lighted up in responsive greeting. For two or three seconds, he gazed at me attentively, exploring my features, until I was on the point of blushing at his somewhat inquisitorial gaze. Seeing this, he assuaged my confusion with a kindly smile.

"So you want to inscribe yourself among my students? We must have a good talk. Excuse me for a few minutes.

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If you care to wait for me outside, you can walk home with me."

He gave me his hand, his small, delicate hand, which fluttered in mine for a moment. Then he turned to the next member of the circle.

Ten minutes later, considerably agitated, I was waiting for him outside. What was I to say to him when he asked about my previous studies? How was I to tell him that literature had not been one of my interests either as work or as play? Would he not regard me with contempt, and perhaps decide to shut me out from that circle which I now longed to enter? But as soon as he appeared, his sympathetic personality dispelled my uneasiness. I could hide nothing from him, and without any urging on his part I hastened to confess that my first term at the university had been utterly wasted. He was not repelled by the admission, but looked at me cordially, and said with an encouraging smile:

"Well, well, the pause is an essential part of music."

Then, unwilling to probe further into matters which might put me to shame, he asked some questions about my home, and where I was lodging. When I told him that I had not yet found a room, he said:

"Perhaps I can help you out of your difficulty. Upstairs in the house where I live there is a deaf old crone who has a room to let. Her student lodgers have always been comfortable. I think it might suit you very well. You must let me know if there is anything else I can do for you. If you have made up your mind to set to work in good earnest, it will be my pleasure as well as my duty to do anything I can for you."

At the door of his flat he shook hands with me once more, and asked me to call on him next evening, when he would talk to me about my studies. So grateful was I for this unexpected kindness, so overwhelmed that,

while I touched his hand in farewell and raised my hat, I quite forgot to utter a word of thanks.

Of course I took that room. I should have done so even if it had been unsuitable, simply in order to be near this charming professor, who in one hour had given me so much more than all the others put together had done. As a matter of fact, the room was admirable. It was the garret over my teacher's flat. Though made rather dark by the overhanging wooden gables, it commanded an extensive view above the neighbouring roofs and past the church tower to a green square, and the open sky with clouds that reminded me of my home near the sea. The deaf landlady was a friendly soul who delighted in mothering her lodger. I came to terms with her at once, and within an hour my luggage had been brought up the creaking staircase.

I stayed at home that evening, forgetting to eat, and even to smoke. By chance I had put a volume of Shakespeare in my trunk. I had not looked at his plays for years, but was now eager to read them again. How different the words and phrases seemed, in the light of what I had heard that afternoon. Is it possible to account for such transformations? A new world was opened to me. The words rushed towards me as if they had been in search of me for centuries. The verses surged through my veins like waves of fire, until I felt in my temples that strange sense of lightsomeness one feels in a flying dream. I trembled; I was in a fever of excitement—and all this was the outcome of listening to an impassioned discourse. It had intoxicated me, and the intoxication persisted. When I read some passages aloud, I found that my voice was unconsciously imitating his, that the eager cadence of the lines was the cadence he had used, and that my hands were imitating the gestures he had made. As if by magic I had, within an hour, broken down the wall

which had hitherto shut me out from the world of the spirit. A new passion had awakened, a passion which has lasted without stint throughout the ensuing forty years—the joyful sympathy with all that is human, made actual by inspired words. I had opened the volume at *Coriolanus*, and it was a wonder and a delight to recognize that I had within myself all the elements of this ancient Roman, alien though he may seem from our days: pride, arrogance, anger, scorn, mockery; all the salt, all the lead, all the gold, all the metals of the feelings. A new rapture, to become suddenly aware of this magic and to understand it. I read until my eyes were sore. When I looked at my watch, it was half-past three. Almost alarmed at this new power which had at one and the same time stimulated and benumbed my senses for six hours, I put out the light. But the images continued to chase one another through my mind. I could hardly sleep in my longing for the new day in which I was to enter into possession of the world which had been so strangely opened to me.

Morning brought disappointment. In my eagerness, I was the first to enter the lecture hall where my teacher was to deliver his course. When he appeared, I was startled. Was this the man whose acquaintance I had made the day before? Had the excitement of my mood transformed him? Had some trick of memory refashioned him into a *Coriolanus*: into one who flashes lightnings from the Forum, heroically bold; one who holds sway over all whom he encounters? It was an old and tired man who entered now with halting footsteps. It seemed as if the light had gone out of his features. He looked weary, and almost ill. From my front bench I could see that his face was seamed with wrinkles, and that there were deep shadows beneath his eyes. The lids were too heavy; the lips were pale and thin; the voice lacked

resonance. What had become of the chee'ful vigour, the joyful exuberance of his manner? Surely the voice was a different one? As if subdued by the topic of his lecture, it rolled on in a fatiguing monotone.

I was greatly disturbed. This was not the man I had been longing to see since my first waking movement. This was not the starlike being my memory had pictured. Nothing but a worn-out professor expounding his dull theme. I listened anxiously for the recurrence of yesterday's tone, for the cordial vibrations which had stirred my feelings and touched them to passion. I looked at him ever more anxiously, exploring a stranger's face with a sense of profound disillusionment. Certainly it was the same countenance, but emptied of meaning, void of creative energy, tired, the parchment visage of an old man. How could it have happened? Could a man be young one moment and old the next? Could there be ebullitions of the spirit so powerful that while a man is giving expression to them in speech his face is transformed and he becomes ten or twenty years younger?

The problem tormented me. I thirsted to know more of this enigmatical creature. The instant the lecture was over, as soon as he had gone without as much as a glance at any of us, I hastened to the library and asked for his writings. Perhaps he was only suffering from transient fatigue. Maybe he was ailing to-day, and this had damped his fires. In the permanent expressions of his activity I should surely find the solution of the riddle. The attendant brought me the books, and I was astonished to find how few there were. In twenty years he had published nothing more than this paltry collection of slim volumes: introductions, prefaces, a discussion as to whether *Pericles* was a genuine work of Shakespeare, a comparison between Hölderlin and Shelley (this, indeed, penned at a date when Hölderlin was still little esteemed in Germany, and when the genius of Shelley

had not been fully recognized by the English), and some philological and literary small change. True, every one of the books contained an announcement of a work in two volumes, to be entitled *The Globe Theatre, Its History, Its Plays, and Its Playwrights*. The first of these announcements was twenty years old, but when I asked the librarian for the book he told me that it had not yet been published. Discouraged though I was, I turned over the pages of the works at my disposal, hoping to find in them echoes of the stirring voice, traces of the vigorous rhythms, of yesterday. Nothing was discernible beyond the steady and uninteresting swing of a pendulum—earnest but dull, devoid of the impetus which had winged his discourse. I sighed as I read. I could have beaten myself, so enraged was I at my own credulity, at the readiness with which I had let my feelings carry me away.

In the classroom that afternoon, however, he was again the man of yesterday. For a good while, he did not speak. A debate after the English fashion had been arranged. There was a set topic, chosen by the professor from his beloved Shakespeare—the question whether the figures of *Troilus and Cressida*, his favourite play, were or were not to be regarded as burlesques; and whether the drama should be looked upon as a satire, or as a tragedy hiding behind a mask of scorn. Under his guidance, the discussion grew warm; what had been purely intellectual differences became charged with strong feeling; indifferent expressions of opinion flamed up into heated argument; the debate became so acrimonious that a bout at fisticuffs seemed imminent. At the right moment, when the sparks were flashing, he intervened, piloted the dispute back on to the intellectual plane, expounded its more general and timeless aspects. Thus, of a sudden, he took up his station in the midst of this dialectical furnace, himself strongly moved, simultaneously exciting

and restraining the debaters, master of these stormy waves of youthful enthusiasm even while he himself was carried upon their crest. Leaning against the table, arms folded, he glanced from face to face, smiling at one, by a nod encouraging another to answer. Just as on the previous afternoon, his eyes were aglow with excitement; and I realized that he had to keep a tight hand on himself in order to control his natural impulse to snatch the words from their mouths and himself take the floor. This self-restraint was shown by the way in which his folded arms were gripping his chest like a hoop on a cask, and by the twitching of the corners of his mouth. At length his eagerness overpowered him. He plunged into the fray, dominated it in an instant. With a wave of his hand he quelled the tumult. When silence was restored, he proceeded to summarize the arguments. As he spoke, he began to look like the man I had first seen. The wrinkles vanished from the animated face; his stoop disappeared; he seemed to grow in height. The spell of his own improvisation lured him on, and at length I understood why there had been such a contrast between the dry lecture of the morning and the impassioned discourse of the afternoon; to understand the lack of fire in his writings. When he was delivering a formal lecture or was alone at his desk, there was nothing to kindle his reserved and repressed nature. But here, amid these stimulating contacts, the walls of reserve were broken down. Our enthusiasm was needed to arouse his; our unrestraint must stir his impulse to give freely; the inspiration of our youth must revive his own. Like a cymbal-player intoxicated by the clashing rhythm of the brazen disks, he spoke ever more ardently, became continually more vivid and picturesque. Our breathless silence as we listened was the emotional spur that he needed to sustain the pæan of his exposition.

He ended with a stirring quotation from Goethe's

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Oration on Shakespeare. Thereupon our enthusiasm burst impetuously forth. As on the previous day, he was exhausted after his effort, leaning against the table, his face pale, but still twitching with excitement. I felt a little afraid of speaking to him at such a moment, but his eyes chanced to light on me. The expression of reverent gratitude in my face must have pleased him, for he smiled genially, leaned towards me, laid his hand on my shoulder, and reminded me that I was to come and see him in the evening.

Punctually at seven I kept the appointment, and it was with a sense of strong emotion that I crossed his threshold for the first time. What can be more passionate than a lad's veneration—timid and feminine in its bashfulness? I was shown into his study. The light was fading, so that at first all I could make out was the backs of innumerable books showing through the glass doors of the bookcases. Over the writing-table hung Raphael's School of Athens, a picture (as I afterwards learned) he was especially fond of because it was a symbolical synthesis of all the ways of teaching and of all the embodiments of the mind. I had never seen it before, and to my fancy it seemed that there was a strong resemblance between the professor's face and that of Socrates in the picture. From the other side of the room came the sheen of white marble; it was an admirable miniature reproduction of the Ganymede in the Louvre. Close at hand, on the wall, was a picture of St. Sebastian by a German old master; and I could not but think that this juxtaposition of tragical beauty with joyful beauty was no chance matter.

Except for these silent works of art, the room was empty, and I waited there, silent too, though with beating heart, for they spoke to me symbolically of a new kind of spiritual beauty, unsuspected before, and not yet plain to me, though I already felt a sense of kinship with it. The professor soon came in. Once more he looked

at me with that penetrating and all-embracing glance behind which masked fires seemed to peep—fires which, to my own astonishment, thawed the innermost recesses of my being. In a few moments, I was speaking to him as openly as if he had been an old friend. When he asked me about my studies in Berlin, I suddenly (to my own alarm) found myself telling him of the circumstances of my father's surprise visit. Then, to this stranger, I renewed my secret vow to devote myself earnestly to my studies. He was considerably moved.

"Earnestly, no doubt," he said; "but above all, I hope, with passion. He who studies without passion will never become anything more than a pedant. We must approach knowledge from the inside; inspired by passion."

His voice became more and more cordial; the room grew darker. He told me much of his own youth; how he, too, had made a false and foolish start, and had been slow to discover his real bent. I need only pluck up courage, and he would do everything he could do to help me. I must not hesitate to bring all my difficulties to him. Never had anyone talked to me so sympathetically, with so much understanding. I trembled with gratitude and was glad that it was dark, for my eyes were wet with tears.

I did not notice the flight of time, and should have been glad to go on talking and listening to him for hours. But there came a tap at the door. It was opened, and a slender figure appeared, dimly visible. He stood up, and introduced the newcomer, saying:

"My wife."

The shadowy figure came up to me. I felt a small hand in mine for a minute. Then she turned to him, saying:

"Supper is ready."

"All right! All right!" he answered, somewhat petulantly it seemed to me.

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His voice had grown chilly and aloof. The man who bade me farewell with an indifferent gesture was once more the elderly and weary scholar who had delivered the lecture in the morning.

The next fortnight was spent in a frenzy of reading and learning. I hardly ever left my room; I bolted my meals, studied without a pause, wasted very little time upon sleep. I was like the third calendar, son of a king, in the oriental tale, who explores room after room in a magic palace. Each door in succession leads him into a chamber more wonderfully stored than the last with jewels and other treasures, so that he goes on eagerly from one to the other, impatient to come to the last. Thus did I hasten from one book to the next, enthralled by every one of them, but satiated by none. My unrestraint had now been transferred into the world of the spirit. I had begun to realize how immeasurable was the expanse of that world, whose delights were to prove no less seductive to me than the joys of the flesh which had allured me in the great city. I had a boyish fear that I should never be able to grasp all these new joys. That was why I grudged the time needed for sleep, for bodily pleasures, for conversation, for any form of distraction. At length I had learned the value of time, and wished to use it to the uttermost. But an even greater spur to diligence was vanity. I wished to make good in my teacher's eyes. Not for anything would I disappoint him. I wanted to earn his smile of approval, to win his admiration as he had won mine, to impress him, to amaze him. The most trifling incident of allusion became a test for me. If, in one of his lectures, he mentioned a poet with whose writings I was unfamiliar, I would spend the afternoon looking them up, so that next day in the discussion I could flaunt my knowledge. Some casually expressed wish, scarcely noticed by the other students, was for me

a command. He had merely to drop a critical word concerning the way in which the young men were perpetually smoking, and I had flung away my own cigarette on the instant, and had given up the use of tobacco for ever. His words were gospel to me. I was on the watch to be guided by his most indifferent observations. I scanned his features eagerly, examining them and his utterances with passionate attention and storing them in my memory. Just as I regarded him as my only leader, so did I look upon my fellow-students as nothing but enemies whom it was my main purpose to outrun and to excel.

Had he realized how much he meant to me; or had my impetuosity won his affection? I could not tell, but unquestionably he singled me out. He continued to advise me about my reading. In the afternoon discussions he encouraged me to take a more active part than was perhaps suitable for a newcomer! Often, in the evening, he would invite me to his rooms for a talk. During such interviews he would take a book from the shelf, to read a poem or a passage from a play in a voice which rang out more clearly and sonorously as the reader's emotion waxed. At another time he would elucidate some thorny problem. In this first fortnight of enthusiastic discipleship, I learned more about the essentials of art than I had learned in the previous nineteen years of my existence. During this hour which passed like a flash, we were always alone together. At eight o'clock would come the tap at the door, his wife's warning that supper was ready. But she did not again enter the room.

A fortnight had gone by, a fortnight in early summer. The weather had been very hot, and my days and nights had been spent as I have described. Then my working powers snapped like an over-strained spring. My teacher

had already warned me against excess of zeal, advising me to take a day off now and again. It was plain to me that morning that his counsel had been wise. I awoke heavily from a heavy sleep, and as soon as I tried to read I found that the letters were blurred. Obedient to my master's advice, I decided to spend the day in the open. Setting forth instantly, I made my first visit to the older parts of the little town. To stretch my limbs, I climbed the hundreds of steps leading to the top of the church tower, and thence caught sight of a little lake shining in a green expanse. Born and bred on the seacoast, I was passionately devoted to swimming, and the sight of the water was enough to make me long for a dip. On the shores of the lake I found a bathing establishment. As soon as I was in the water, I began to feel my strength renewed. My muscles, unused for weeks, rejoiced in their activity. The play of sunshine and wind and spray on my naked body had within half an hour made me, as of old, a careless young fellow apt for any folly. Forgotten were books and sciences. With the unrestrained fervour characteristic of my temperament, I gave myself up to the delights of an exercise from which I had long been debarred. I had been two hours in the water; had taken perhaps thirty headers from the spring-board, discharging and renewing my energies in the plunge; twice I had swum across the lake and back, and was still far from being tired out. My muscles were tense, awaiting some new test. I was agog for adventure.

At this moment, from the ladies' bathing house close at hand, came the jar of the spring-board. I looked round, and saw a graceful feminine form in the act of diving. There was a splash, a moment's pause. Then the well-knit figure reappeared, and with vigorous strokes the swimmer made for an islet in the middle of the lake.

"After her! Catch her!" came the impulse, and in an

flogged through the market-place than be made to seem ridiculous in his eyes.

Terrible were the hours I passed wandering the streets till evening came. A thousand times I pictured to myself how he would receive me with a delicately sarcastic smile—for he was a master in the arts of sarcasm and irony, could heat a witticism white hot. No condemned man mounting the scaffold can have felt more miserable than did I as I went upstairs to his flat. Trying to choke down my discomposure, I entered his study. My confusion was increased by a sound from the next room, the whisk of a skirt as I fancied. No doubt she was listening there to gloat over my embarrassment, to delight in hearing me given a good dressing down.

At length my teacher came in.

"What is the matter?" he asked anxiously. "You look so pale."

I said there was nothing amiss, and waited for the blow. It did not come. He talked in his usual way of the abstract matters in which he was interested. Neither his words nor his tone of voice betrayed sarcasm; there were no covert allusions. With astonishment, and then with delight, I realized that she had not said a word to him.

At eight o'clock came her knock at the door. I bade farewell to my teacher, and my heart was once more in my mouth. As I came out, she passed down the passage. I said good evening, and she greeted me with a friendly smile. My heart sang within me, for I interpreted this forgiveness as a pledge—a pledge of continued silence.

From that hour my attention took a new turn. Hitherto, in boyish veneration and devotion, I had regarded my teacher almost as if he were a spirit from another world, and had therefore completely forgotten to observe his private, his earthly life. With the extrava-

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gance characteristic of idolization, I had assumed his existence to be remote from the daily institutions of our methodically ordered world. Just as little as a young man who has fallen in love for the first time ventures in imagination to strip the object of his affections and to regard her as naturally as the thousands of other bodiced and skirted beings who come into his ken, just so little had I dared to direct a stealthy glance towards his private life. I looked upon him as a sublimated being, detached from the trivial and the circumstantial; a messenger of the word; an embodiment of the creative spirit. Now, in the tragi-comical adventure I have described, his wife had crossed my path. I could no longer refrain from the close contemplation of his domesticities. In spite of myself, I had a restless inclination to spy upon his doings. The immediate result of these investigations was to complicate my picture of him, for his private life was a strange one, was almost alarmingly enigmatical. Ere long I was invited to dinner. When I saw the pair together, I could not but realize that there was something amiss in their relationship, and the impression grew when I became more closely acquainted with the inner circles of the household. It was not that in word or deed there was any obvious sign of tension or of mutual hostility. The very absence of any such signs was so remarkable. That was the enigma. The all-pervading apathy, the lack of feeling, made the atmosphere more oppressive than any amount of quarrelling, any storm of declared enmity, or any signs of suppressed animosity. Outwardly, there was nothing to show that either of the two harboured a sense of irritation towards the other. Nevertheless I had a growing conviction that each lived utterly aloof. When, as rarely happened, they spoke to one another, this verbal intercourse was fugitive, was carried on (so to speak) at arm's length. They never seemed to be walking side by side cordially, hand in

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hand. Even towards me, when I was at table with the pair, my teacher was chary of words. The conversation dried up. A heavy silence ensued, a silence which no one ventured to break, a silence which burdened my spirit for hours after the ordeal was over.

Above all, I was painfully impressed by the man's loneliness. Expansive though he was by temperament, he had no friends. His pupils were his only associates, and his sole consolation. His intercourse with his academic colleagues was on the plane of formal civility, nothing more. He never dined or supped with any of them. For days together, he would leave his flat only to go to the university. He kept thoughts and feelings to himself, seeking no outlet in conversation or in writing. Now I was able to understand the eruptive character of his discourses in our student circle. It was then that, after long brooding, he gave vent to all the ideas he had been turning over in his mind. They broke forth with vehement impetuosity. He was like a spirited horse when it is first taken out after being confined to the stable. That is why, when the springs of silence had been at length unsealed, the pent-up waters gushed forth in so impetuous a torrent of words.

At home he rarely spoke, and least of all to his wife. Raw youth though I was, it was plain to me that there was a shadow between these two, an impalpable and invisible but insuperable barrier. For the first time I became aware that in marriage there may be, and often is, a core of mystery. As if a pentacle had been drawn on the threshold, his wife never ventured within the precincts of his study without special invitation—this symbolizing the way in which she was completely shut out from his intellectual world. Nor would my teacher ever allow any conversation about his work to be continued in her presence. Most embarrassing to me was the way in which, when she entered the room, he would

suddenly cut himself short in the middle of an animated sentence. In this respect, his manner was frankly contemptuous. There was no civil endeavour to conceal the slight. It was as if the door had been slammed in her face, though she made as if she had not noticed the affront. She was a high-spirited young woman. Lithe and slender, nimble and light of foot, she tripped easily up and down the stairs, always busy and yet with plenty of time to spare. She often went to the theatre, and participated actively in various kinds of outdoor exercise. Nevertheless, though she must by now have been about five-and-thirty, she appeared to have no interest in books, household affairs, indoor life, tranquil contemplation. She did not seem to be at ease unless (a song or a laugh on her lips, a quip on her ready tongue) she was footing it in the dance, swimming in the lake, taking a brisk walk, working off steam in one way or another. She would never talk seriously to me, preferring to tease me as if I were a hobbledohoy, or at most to vie with me in some feat of strength or test of endurance. Her joy in the healthy life of the senses was in such perplexing contrast with the retiring habits of my teacher, with his exclusive interest in the things of the mind, that again and again I racked my brains in the endeavour to puzzle out what could have brought these two antagonistic natures together. In actual fact, this strange contrast was helpful to me, personally. When, after a spell of hard mental work, I had a talk with her, it was as if a heavy helmet had been lifted from my brow. I came back from an ecstatic absorption in the things of the spirit to move once more through the everyday world, where daylight hues prevailed. The cheerful amenities of ordinary life came into their own; and laughter, which in my teacher's stimulating presence I had almost forgotten, brought me an agreeable relaxation from the overmastering oppression of the spiritual. She and I were young comrades

together. Precisely because she would only talk to me about unimportant matters, or because we went to the theatre together, our association was free from all elements of tension. There was only one thing that could interfere with the unrestraint of our companionship—the mention of his name. Whenever I spoke of him, she dammed up my interest or my curiosity with a wall of hostile silence; or, if I let myself go in my enthusiasm about him, she would freeze me with a half smile. She never took me into her confidence; she would never speak of him. As he had shut her out of his life, so had she, as decisively though in a different way, shut him out of hers. The house which had sheltered the pair for fifteen years kept its secrets well.

The more impenetrable this mystery, the more exasperating it became. A curtain was drawn across the reality of their life together, and yet I saw it stirred again and again by the breath of what lay behind. Often I seemed to be on the trail, and then the solution would escape me. Again and again this happened; never could I get a grip upon what I sought. To the young, what can be more disturbing, what more unsettling and tantalizing, than the play of vague suspicions? The fancy, ceasing to wander in the void, concentrates upon a definite aim, and luxuriates in the febrile pleasures of the chase. In those days, I developed new senses: a new ear-drum, which intercepted with unwonted delicacy every whisper of sound; a sharp-sighted eye, full of suspicion; a curiosity which rummaged every corner and burrowed in the darkness. My nerves were on edge, as again and again I thought I had discovered a clue, only to find that it led nowhere.

Looking back, however, I cannot blame myself for that breathless curiosity. There was nothing base about it. What stimulated all my perceptions was not a lustful inquisitiveness, not an eager but shameful longing to

detect a venerated person in some mean action. What moved me was a secret anxiety, a puzzled and hesitant compassion, which led me to the vague and painful conviction that my teacher and his wife were both mutely suffering. The nearer I came to him, the more distressingly was I aware of the shadow on his beloved face; the more plainly did I perceive the signs of a noble melancholy nobly mastered, of a melancholy which never degenerated into sullenness, petulance, or anger. Whereas at first I had been drawn to him by his torrential eloquence, now, when I knew him better, what chiefly impressed me and grieved me was his reticence, his veiled unhappiness. Nothing moves young people so much as to witness a sublime and virile gloom. Michelangelo's thinker staring down into the abyss of his own thoughts, Beethoven's poignantly drawn lips; these tragical masks of universal suffering touch the crude emotions of youth far more than Mozart's silver melodies or the crystalline light that radiates from Leonardo's figures. Being itself beauty, youth has no need of transfiguration. In the superabundance of its vital forces, it is allured by the tragical, and in its inexperience, is prone to accept the embraces of melancholy. That, too, is why youth is always ready for danger, and ever willing to extend a brotherly hand towards mental pain.

This was the first time I had ever seen intense suffering of such a kind. Grown to manhood in the easy circumstances of the middle class, trouble had come into my ken only under the ludicrous mask of common life: clad as ill-humour; wearing the yellow robe of envy; or jingling its loose coins. But the sorrows I was now witnessing were compounded—this was plain to me from the first—of nobler elements. Often when I went to his room, and, in his abstraction, he failed to answer my knock (so that, ashamed and confused, I had to enter uninvited, and surprised him in his brooding), it seemed

to me as if the occupant of the study was only Wagner, the wraith, wearing Faust's bodily vesture, while Faust's spirit was gliding through fathomless abysses and dread Walpurgis nights. At such moments, my teacher was dead to the world. He did not pay heed to my footsteps when I drew near, or answer my timid greeting. When, at length, he came to himself, he would say a few perfunctory words to cover his embarrassment; would walk up and down the room and speak of indifferent matters to ward off questions. For a long time the shadow would remain on his face, and would not be dispelled until our conversation had become animated.

Often enough he must have noticed that I was deeply affected at the sight of his troubles. My demeanour must have shown that I was longing to share, and thus perhaps to lighten, his sorrows. He must have realized this, for at times he would break off our lively conversation to look at me fixedly and affectionately, so that I was overwhelmed by the cordiality of his troubled gaze. At such times he would take my hand in his and would hold it while my disquiet grew. From moment to moment I thought:

"Now, now, now at last he will speak."

But, instead, there would come a brusque gesture; or a chilling and maybe sarcastic word. He, though himself prone to enthusiasm, though he had awakened and fostered enthusiasm in me, would then suddenly expunge it as if it had been a mistake in a badly written exercise. The more obvious my craving for his confidence, the more grimly would he keep me at a distance, saying coldly that I did not understand what I was talking about and should avoid exaggeration—cutting phrases which filled me with despair. How I suffered under these sudden transitions, when he changed in a moment from hot to cold, chilling me after he himself had heated me,

crushing my impetuosity when he had just been stimulating it with his own! Such experiences were horrible, and made me feel that the more I strove towards intimacy the more harshly did he thrust me back. His secret was his own, and he would have me know that I was to keep my distance.

For there was a secret. My conviction grew. A strange, a sinister secret was shrouded in the depths of this man who exercised so magical a charm. His fugitive glances showed that there was something hidden: his ardent advances were countered by shy retreats when, gratefully, I came half-way to meet him. That there was a secret was shown by the occasional bitterness of his wife's expression; by the reserve of his fellow-townsmen when he was spoken of; by the indignation some of them gave vent to when he was praised; by a hundred remarkable instances. How great was my chagrin to discover, after fancying that I had entered the innermost circles of such a being, that I was merely wandering in the outer pathways of a labyrinth, with no clue leading to the heart of the maze.

What I found most inexplicable were his escapades. One morning, there was a notice on the door of the theatre to the effect that there would be no lecture for two days. The other students took it as a matter of course; but I, who had been with him overnight, was afraid that he must have been taken ill. I hurried home to inquire. His wife met my alarmed questioning with a wry smile.

"This is nothing out of the common," she said coldly. "You've not got used to it yet."

Talking the matter over with my fellow-students I learned that it was, in fact, common enough for him to disappear without warning, and to send a wire in excuse for his absence. On one of these occasions, a student had met him at four in the morning in the streets of Berlin;

another time he had been seen in a provincial town, in a tavern. In general, however, no one knew where he went. He vanished suddenly for a day or two, that was all.

This unexpected development made me feel positively ill, and during the two days he was away I wandered restlessly about, unable to work. With him away, my studies seemed unmeaning. My mind grew weary in its ceaseless round of jealous suppositions. I was filled with mingled hatred and wrath because he shut himself away from me, and because I, who was so eager for his confidence, should know no more of his real life than an outsider. Vainly did I continue to remind myself that a student had no right to hold him to account for his doings; that, in his kindness, he had already done a hundred times more for me than the duties of his professorial position demanded. Reason was powerless; passion guided my footsteps. A dozen times a day, dolt that I was, I went to ask if he had returned—only to stop my fruitless inquiries when his wife's negative answers grew snappish. I lay awake half the night listening for his footfall on the stair; and next morning I prowled round the door, not venturing to ask again whether he was back. When at length, on the third day, he unexpectedly entered my room, I gasped. He was obviously annoyed by the signs of my emotion, and hastened to turn the matter off indifferently. But he avoided my eyes, and our conversation was a halting one. Though we were both careful to make no allusion to his absence, what was unexpressed became a hidden barrier. No sooner had he gone, than curiosity flamed up within me, and thenceforward it monopolized my thoughts by day and my dreams by night.

This longing for intimate knowledge dominated me for weeks. My whole being yearned towards the fiery

core whose existence I sensed beneath the rocky silence. At length, in a happy hour, came my first entry into his inner world.

I had been sitting in his room till the light faded. Then he went to a locked bookcase, and took from it a volume of Shakespeare's sonnets. First of all he read me some of them, and reproduced their pithy metaphors in an improvised translation. Passing on to comment, he deciphered their almost impenetrable meaning, throwing so magical a light on the subject that even amid my fascination and happiness I was filled with concern that his wisdom should find expression only in fugitive spoken words. I plucked up courage to ask him why he had never finished his magnum opus, his history of the Globe Theatre. I was taken aback to find that involuntarily I had thrust my finger into a wound. The expression on his face made this plain. He stood up, and for a long time paced to and fro in silence. Then he came close to me, and looked at me earnestly, but found it difficult to speak. Finally he said:

"I cannot write a great work, not now. The day for that is over. Only youth could plan so boldly. I have no staying power left. I have become (why should I hide it from you?) a man of spasmodic moments, and am not capable of persistent effort. I used to be more energetic, but those days have gone for ever. I can only talk. Then, sometimes, I get carried away. But to sit at my desk working day after day, always alone, always alone; that has become impossible."

His gesture of resignation moved me deeply. I returned to the charge, saying that it behoved him to write down in black and white what he was able, from day to day, to put before us so admirably by word of mouth; that it behoved him, not merely to expound another's thoughts, but to give shape to the creations of his own mind:

"I cannot write," he wearily repeated. "I lack the power of concentration."

"Why not dictate, then," I eagerly inquired. "Dictate to me," I implored. "Give it a trial. Probably it will be enough to dictate the beginning. Then you will be able to go ahead by yourself. Please try dictating. Do it for my sake!"

He stood up, his face a blend of amazement and delight. Then he fell to musing. He was turning the matter over in his mind.

"For your sake? Do you really think that it could matter to anyone; that anyone would be interested if I, now that I am an old man, should set to work again upon my book?"

Plainly, he was inclined to accede to my suggestion. His expression grew animated and hopeful.

"Do you really think it would be any good," he repeated dubiously. Then, impulsively, "Well, we'll try! Youth is always right. Those who follow the counsels of youth are wise."

My outburst of joy and triumph seemed to invigorate him. He walked briskly up and down, as excited as a boy. We agreed that he should dictate to me every evening at nine, immediately after supper, for an hour. Next evening we began.

How can I describe these hours? I was waiting for them throughout the day. Already in the afternoon my pulses were throbbing with impatience, so that I could hardly bear the hours till night fell. Immediately after supper we went to his study. I sat at the writing-table, while he walked up and down behind me, restlessly at first, settling down to a rhythmic gait as he warmed to his subject. He would find some bold metaphor, would describe some plastic situation. These would be the starting-points whence, with growing excitement, he would move rapidly forward into a dramatized scene.

Then the elemental force of creative energy would flash through these improvisations.* I can recall lines that seemed to be the strophes of an iambic poem; and other passages which poured forth in cascades of vivid enumeration like Homer's catalogue of the ships or the barbaric chants of Walt Whitman. This was the first time that I, a young and unformed man, had been vouchsafed a sight into the mystery of production. I saw how the thought, shapeless and intensely hot, was poured like molten bell-metal forth from the cauldron of impulsive excitement; how it gradually took shape as it cooled; how its form was perfected; how at length the meaning was clarified so that just as the clapper makes the bell sound, so the finished phrases gave expression to the heartfelt imaginings of the thinker. As each phrase grows out of rhythm, each depiction out of scenically composed imagery, so did my teacher's finished work grow, with no verbal artifices, out of a pæan, out of a pæan to the sea as the mundane visible and palpable form of the infinite, moving on in waves from distance to distance, looking up to the heights and concealing the depths—and betwixt heights and depths playing (in a way fraught with meaning and yet void of meaning) with human destiny, without frail mortal barques. This metaphor of the sea was followed by a splendid description of tragedy as the elemental force which dominates our blood, intoxicatingly and destructively. Then the imagery became concentrated on one particular country. England rose before our eyes; the island girdled by the stormy waters in which all the continents of the globe are laved. In that sea-girt isle, the ocean holds sway. The cold and clear gaze of the watery element is reflected in the eyes of the inhabitants. Every one of the dwellers in that land is one of the sea-folk, is himself an island. The storms and dangers of the sea have left their mark, and live on to-day in these English, whose ancestors for centuries

were vikings and sea-raiders. Now peace broods over the isle. But the dwellers therein, used to storms, crave for the life of the sea with its daily perils. When it is denied them, they create its stormy likeness for themselves in blood-sports. They build wooden lists for beast-baiting. The voluptuous horror of the spectators is stimulated in bestial fashion by watching cock-fights or by looking on while bears are torn by dogs. Soon there is a demand for a loftier tension of the senses, such as can be derived from the spectacle of heroic human conflicts. Thus there grows out of the medieval religious mysteries, the great drama of human effort, in which the adventures and the voyages of earlier days are depicted—voyages no longer sailed on a real sea, but on the inner sea of man's feelings. A new infinity, another ocean with spring tides of passion and an uprush of the spirit; a determination to steer a course through the waters on which heretofore they were driven at the mercy of winds and waves—such are the new longings of the late-born and vigorous Anglo-Saxon race. Such is the origin of the Elizabethan drama.

Now, as he hurled himself into the description of this barbaric prime, his language became more richly figurative, while his voice gathered strength and grew sonorous. The room seemed too small for the passion that stirred the speaker. I heard the roar of the sea and the whistling of the wind; I was in the very heart of the storm. Bent there over the table, writing for dear life, it seemed to me that I was standing once again on the dunes near my home, listening to the thunder of the waves, and scarcely able to breathe as I faced the blast and the spindrift. Astonished, alarmed, and yet delighted, I realized for the first time in my life the awe that broods over the birth of such a man and of so mighty a word.

When my teacher brought the dictation to a close at some splendid moment in which inspiration was magni-

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ficently outrunning coldly scientific content, and in which thought was flaming into poesy, I was overwhelmed with fatigue. The fatigue was of a very different type from his exhaustion. In him there had been a discharge, a full release of tension; but I, over whom the waves of his thought had been dashing, was battered and buffeted. For both of us, a subsiding phase of gentle converse was essential, if rest and sleep were to become possible. When I had left him, I usually reread my shorthand notes. How strange it was! Hardly had the signs transformed themselves into words, when my breath, my voice, became those of another. I might have been a changeling! I found myself imitating his diction and intonation, as though he were speaking through my mouth. All this happened forty years ago, and yet to-day, in the middle of one of my lectures, when my tongue runs away with me I become aware that I myself am not speaking, but that some one else is speaking through my mouth. I recognize the dear voice of a dead man, of one who, now, can draw breath only through my lips. Whenever enthusiasm wings my thought, I am he. Those hours of dictation made an imprint on me for life.

The work grew, grew around me like a forest, gradually shutting out the view of the outer world. I lived within myself, within the darkness of the house, behind the rustling foliage of the expanding work, in the comprehensive and cordial presence of this man.

Apart from the few hours spent in attending lectures, my whole day was devoted to him. I took my meals with him and his wife. By day and by night, messages went up and down stairs between his flat and my room. We had keys to one another's doors, so that he could find me whenever he pleased without having to trouble the deaf old landlady. The more I became involved in this new community, the more completely was I severed

from the outer world ; while sharing the warmth of that inner sphere, I also shared the chill isolation of his secluded existence. My fellow-students without exception were somewhat cold and even contemptuous in their manner towards me. I could not tell whether they had passed some secret judgment on me, or whether they were merely jealous at my teacher's manifest preference for me ; in any case, they would have nothing to do with me, and in the afternoon discussions they avoided speaking to me or greeting me—it would seem by general agreement. Even the professors regarded me with hostility. When, on one occasion, I asked the instructor of Romance literature for information about some minor point, he fobbed me off with a sarcasm : "Since you are an intimate of Professor K., you ought to be fully informed about the matter." I cudgelled my brains in vain, attempting to puzzle out why I had been sent to Coventry in this way. The fact remained. Since I had become so closely associated with the two solitaires, I myself had had isolation thrust upon me.

This social lock-out troubled me very little, now that my interest was wholly engrossed by the things of the spirit ; but, as time went on, the continuous strain of the work had a bad effect on my nerves. There are debauches of the mind as well as of the body ; and one who indulges in intellectual excesses for weeks without pause, will have to pay for it. I had changed my mode of life too suddenly, had rushed from one extreme to the other, and outraged nature demanded her rights. During my loose life in Berlin I had had plenty of exercise running after women, and my amusements had left no tensions undischarged. Now my over-stimulated senses suffered in the oppressive atmosphere of seclusion. After our spells of dictation, I would sit up till the small hours copying my notes, doing this for my own pleasure, eager to give my beloved teacher the finished manuscript at

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the earliest possible moment. In spite of this, or presumably because of this, I could not sleep when at length I went to bed. My lectures at the university, at which I put in a perfunctory attendance, made further demands upon my energies. Then there were the conversations with my teacher, and these were a much greater tax upon me, for I strained every nerve to show myself continually receptive. At length my body began to resent these exactions. I had several fainting fits, warning signs which I ignored, with the result that I became more and more tired out. My nerves were increasingly irritable, and my powers of concentration began to suffer.

The first person to remark upon the risk to which I was exposing myself was my teacher's wife. I had several times noticed her looking at me anxiously. Then she began to intersperse her conversation with such remarks as that it was a mistake to try and conquer the world in one term. Then she spoke more plainly. It was on a fine Sunday, when she found me poring over a grammar. She snatched the book away from me.

"Enough for to-day! How can a young and active man like you make a slave of himself from ambition? Don't take my husband as an example; he is old. You must live in a different way."

Whenever she spoke of him, it was with an undertone of contempt, which always pricked my devotion and roused my anger. Deliberately, inspired (so I thought) by a wrong-headed jealousy, she tried to keep me away from him, and she made mock of my extravagant zeal. If, in the evenings, he went on too long with his dictation, she would knock briskly at the door, and, indifferent to his annoyance, would insist on our stopping our work.

"If he goes on like this, you'll have a nervous breakdown," she once said to me bitterly when she found me utterly tired out. "What a terrible effect he has had

upon you in these few weeks! I can't bear to watch you ruining your health like this. Besides . . ."

She did not finish the sentence. She pressed her lips tightly together in restrained anger.

It was true that my teacher did not give me an easy time. The more fervently I devoted myself to his service, the more indifferently did he accept my aid. Rarely did he thank me. When, early in the morning, I brought him the manuscript I had been writing half through the night, he would take it from me with the dry remark:

"To-morrow would have done just as well."

If my eagerness ran away with me and led me to offer unsolicited service, I was usually met with a curt refusal. When, humiliated and confused, I shrank back into myself, as likely as not he would smile at me cordially once more, attempting to console me. Such moments of geniality were rare, so rare! These alternations of heat and cold, of cordiality and standoffishness, so completely undermined my self-control that I longed—nay, how can I say in plain words what I longed for, what sign of active sympathy my overstrained enthusiasm led me to crave? When a man has a passion for a woman, and when that passion is of such a nature that he regards her with reverent admiration as an image of purity, none the less, in the unconscious, his desires turn towards bodily fulfilment, none the less the goal of physical possession is prefigured in the deepest recesses of his imagination. But when the passion is confined to the realm of the spirit, and, in that realm, is a man's passion for a man, how can it seek fulfilment? Unrestingly, the fancy wanders over the honoured form, flaming up again and again to fresh ecstasy, but never finding repose in a last surrender. It flows on without pause in a current that can never empty the reservoir from which it comes. This passion is insatiable, as the spirit invariably is. Thus I could never have enough of being near to him; could never, in

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our long conversations, find fulfilment in his presence. Even when he seemed to have thrown aside all his reserves, I knew that at any moment he might suddenly put me at my distance once more. These changes in the emotional weather were constantly upsetting me. I do not exaggerate when I say that in my excessive sensitiveness I was often on the verge of behaving like a fool simply because he would lay aside a book carelessly after glancing at a passage to which I had drawn his attention ; or because, after we had been in intimate converse and after he had affectionately laid his hand on my shoulder, he would suddenly jump to his feet and say brusquely :

"You'd better be off now. It's very late. Good night !"

Such trifles would upset my balance for hours or days. It may well be that in my nervous and irritable condition I was on the lookout for slights, and saw them where they did not exist. These belated explanations and exculpations do not lessen the turmoil I experienced at the time. The torture was repeated day after day. I glowed when he allowed me to draw near, and I shivered when he kept me at a distance ; I was perpetually disappointed by his reserve, was never tranquillized, was perplexed by every chance happening.

Now comes a strange thing to record. Whenever my feelings had been wounded by his behaviour, I fled for consolation to his wife. Perhaps I was driven by a half-understood longing for the companionship of one who suffered like me from being at arm's length. Maybe, however, there was nothing more at work than the need for friendly converse ; the need to find, if not a helper, at least someone who would understand. Whatever the explanation, I fled to her as to a secret ally. As a rule she laughed my pique away, or declared with a shrug that I ought by this time to have got used to his peculiarities. Sometimes, however, she took the matter seriously,

and regarded me with a look of wonder in her eyes when I came to her in despair, almost in tears, hardly able to speak, bursting with suppressed reproaches. On these occasions, she would not say a word, but her face beamed with compassion, and it was plain to me she had to exercise all her powers of self-control in order to keep her thoughts to herself. She, too, had a secret. Presumably it was one common to herself and to her husband. But whereas he bluntly repelled me when I pressed too near it, her usual resource was a jest or a prank which turned me aside from my quest.

Once only I was on the point of inducing her to speak. That morning, when I brought my teacher the transcript, I could not refrain from telling him how profoundly moved I had been by his description of Marlowe. In my exuberance I added that no one else in the world could pen so masterly a portrait. Thereupon he bit his lip, threw the manuscript on to the table, and muttered contemptuously:

"Don't talk such nonsense! What do you understand as yet about mastery?"

These words (which I now know to have been uttered merely as a mask) were enough to darken the day for me. That afternoon, when I was spending an hour with his wife, I had a fit of hysterics, seized her hands, and said:

"Tell me, why does he hate me? Why does he despise me so? What harm have I done him? Why does everything I say annoy him? Help me! Tell me what I had better do. Why is it that he can't bear the sight of me? Tell me! Please tell me!"

At this wild outburst, she stared at me in perplexity.

"Can't bear the sight of you?" She laughed as she spoke; a shrill and ill-natured laugh, which made me draw back in alarm. "Can't bear the sight of you?" She repeated the question and looked at me wrathfully.

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Then she leaned forward ; her face softened ; for the first time she stroked my hair. "Ybu are really a child, a foolish little child. You see nothing and know nothing. So much the better. Were it otherwise, you would suffer still more."

She turned away. Vainly did I seek consolation. Like one tied up inside the black sack of a nightmare, I struggled vainly for an outlet, an explanation, an awakening from the enigma of this conflict of feelings.

Four months had passed, and the term was drawing to a close. I looked forward with dread to the approaching vacation, for I loved my purgatory, whereas the dull domesticity of my home life would be a banishment and a deprivation. I had begun to think of telling my parents that important work would keep me where I was. Lies and subterfuges could be skilfully interwoven to prolong the absorbing relationship. But the day and hour of separation had long ere this been written. They hung over me visibly as the stroke of noon impends in the belfry until the mighty waves of sound ring forth, summoning to work or giving the signal for departure.

How beautiful was the onset of that fateful evening, how treacherously beautiful ! I had been sitting with the pair at supper. The windows were wide open, and through them could be seen the darkling sky in which majestic clouds sailed by ; something limpid and serene radiated from these luminous masses, searching and stimulating the depths of one's being. My teacher's wife and I had been chatting pleasantly. He himself had been silent ; but his silence brooded peacefully over our conversation. In stolen glances I saw that he, too, was serene ; his mind was active but not restless, its movements attuned to that of the summer clouds that were drifting by. From time to time he lifted his glass of wine and held it against the light, rejoicing in the colour.

When he saw my pleasure as I watched his movements he smiled at me, and waved the glass towards me in greeting. Rarely had I seen his face so free from care, his aspect so composed. He was almost cheerful, as if he were listening to distant music or to the converse of invisible speakers. His lips, which in general were subject to little waves of nervous twitchings, were calm and placid, and his forehead, now that he turned towards the window, mirrored the soft light that still streamed in, and looked to me more lovely than ever. It was wonderful to see him so content. Did this content come to him as a harmonious outpouring of the mild summer evening, or was it the fruit of some consolation radiating from within? I could not tell. By this time I was able to read his face like a book, and I was sure that to-day a kindly god had smoothed away his cares.

With unwonted ceremoniousness, he now stood up and invited me to come to his study. Then, turning back to the cupboard, he took another bottle of wine from the shelf, and carried it musingly away with him. His wife, like me, was impressed by the strangeness of his manner. Looking up in astonishment from her sewing, she watched us curiously as we left the room.

The study was, as usual, dimly lighted by a well-shaded lamp, which threw a golden circle upon the white paper that awaited me on the writing-table. I read aloud the last sentences from the manuscript. He always needed this, like the note from a tuning-fork, to start the flow of his thoughts. But whereas, as a rule, the response was immediate, on this occasion it did not come. Silence diffused itself through the room, a tense silence—except for his nervous footfall as he paced up and down behind me. Then, his voice vibrating with emotion, he said:

“Read it once more.”

When I had done so, he began to dictate, quickly and firmly. In a few sentences, the scene was set. He had

been dealing with the cultural antecedents of the drama ; had been giving a fresco of the time, a sketch of its history. Now he turned to the theatre, and showed how the strolling players of the Middle Ages had at length settled down and built themselves permanent homes, chartered and privileged ; the Curtain Theatre, the Rose, the Fortune, and others. Wooden booths for wooden plays ! Then the carpenters made a larger theatre, suited to the accommodation of the growing drama. It was on the south shore of the Thames, its foundation of piles driven into the mud, a hexagon without, circular within, and open to the weather ; but the stage was sheltered by some roofing. This was the Globe Theatre, on whose boards Shakespeare, the master dramatist, acted. As if cast up by the sea, a strange ship, flying the red flag, it lies there on the Thames mud. The pit is thronged with a noisy crowd of the common people ; dockside loafers they might be. In the galleries the gentry are laughing and chattering as they look down on the stage. Impatiently they clamour for the start. They stamp noisily, knock on the floor with the pommels of their swords, until at length the stage is lighted by a couple of flares. Figures, costumed haphazard, appear to play an apparently improvised comedy. Then (I can still recall his actual words), "there suddenly begins to blow that storm of phrases, begins to rage that boundless sea of passion, whose waves moved out from this wooden shore to all times, and to all regions of the human heart, inexhaustible and unfathomable, comic and tragic, infinitely manifold, archetypal of mankind ; the English theatre ; Shakespeare's drama."

With this vigorous picture, the flow of words came to an end. A long and oppressive silence followed. I turned round to see what was amiss. My teacher was standing in an attitude familiar to me by now, an attitude of fatigue, one hand gripping a corner of the table. The

rigidity of his posture was alarming. Afraid that he was ill, I jumped up and anxiously inquired whether I was to stop writing. He stared at me breathlessly, still rigid for a while. At length his pose relaxed, and the light came back into his eyes. He moved towards me, saying impressively:

"Don't you understand?"

"What do you mean?" I stammered.

He took a deep breath, smiled at me with a tender and caressive expression which had been absent from his face for months, and said:

"The first part is finished!"

I was in the mood to shout for joy in my delight and surprise. Absorbed in my work as amanuensis, I had failed to realize the progress of the book. There was the edifice, splendidly constructed. The stage was set, ready for the entrance of Marlowe, Ben Jonson, and Shakespeare. The work was celebrating its first birthday. This opening section of one hundred and seventy closely written pages, was the most difficult one. What came next would be an easy matter, for he could give free rein to his creative fancy, hitherto trammelled by having to keep in close touch with the facts of the historical situation. Beyond question, he would finish it, his work, our work!

Did I shout; did I dance for joy, pride, happiness? I cannot remember. My enthusiasm must have taken unusual and unexpected forms in its exuberance, for he smiled indulgently at me as I arranged the manuscript, weighed it in my hand, fingered it lovingly, and began to speculate how soon we could hope to finish the whole. Though his pride and gratification were more restrained, his own feelings were reflected in mine, and he looked at me much moved. Then he came quite close to me, held out both his hands, clasped mine, and stood motionless gazing at me. As he looked at me thus cordially, my

whole being was suffused with the glow of an Italian noon. Then he spoke:

"I know that I should never have begun this work but for you. You gave the impetus needed to set my inertia in movement, and it is you who have rescued what remains of my disintegrated and sterile existence. No one else has ever done so much for me. No one else has ever helped me so loyally. It is you, dear lad, whom I have to thank for all this. Come! We will be brothers together for an hour."

He drew me to the table, and took up the bottle which was waiting there. He had brought two glasses, foreseeing this little festival as a symbolical expression of his gratitude. I trembled in my delight, for nothing moves us so much as this ardent sense of fulfilment. The signs of intimacy he was now giving, the signs I had unconsciously been craving for, the sense of brotherhood which was to bridge the chasm of the years; how precious they were to me! Then came a little hindrance to the progress of our festival. The bottle of wine and the glasses were ready, but he had forgotten to bring a corkscrew. He moved to fetch one, but I forestalled him. I would fetch it from the dining-room. I opened the door leading into the unlighted passage.

My movement was quick and sudden. In the darkness I came into contact with a soft form, which yielded before me. It was my teacher's wife. She had been listening at the door. Though thus taken by surprise, she made no sound, and I was equally silent. We stood there for a moment, both embarrassed. Then I heard her soft tread as she went into the dining-room. She struck a light there, and I saw her facing me as she leaned against the sideboard. Her cheeks were pale; she searched me with her eyes; her demeanour conveyed something betwixt a warning and a threat. She said not a word.

My hands trembled when, after what seemed a long

eyes of his wife. What had I to do with their secret? Why should both of them be content to leave me blind-folded amid the storms of their passions? Why did they persecute me with their inscrutable antagonisms? Why did each of them perplex me with an enigma of scorching wrath and hatred?

I was still in a fever, so I sprang out of bed and flung the window wide. I looked forth upon the peaceful town. There were still lights in some of the windows. Those who sat in the comfortable rooms would be engaged in cheerful conversation, or reading perhaps, making music or listening to it. In the rooms whose windows were dark, the occupants doubtless were sleeping quietly. Over all these tranquil roofs, tranquillity brooded like the moon wrapped in silver mist. When the church clock struck eleven, the sound did no violence to the peaceful night. But in this house where I dwelt was a sense of uneasy wakefulness, hostile investment by alien thoughts. Vainly I tried to interpret the confused whispers with which the place was filled.

Suddenly I started. Was not that a footstep on the stair? Yes, hesitatingly it came, distinguishable mainly through the creaking of the treads. Whoever was coming, must be coming to me, for besides myself there was only one occupant of the garret floor, the deaf old woman, who never had any visitors and must have gone to sleep long ago. Was it my teacher? His step was hasty and decisive; the footfalls I now heard were hesitant, furtive. It must be an intruder, a criminal; no friend. I listened in tense expectation; chilly now, though the night was warm.

I heard the lock grate gently. The sinister guest must be at my very door. I felt a draught on my bare toes, showing that the outer door had been opened. No one but my teacher had a key. If it was he, why so timid? Could he be worried about me? Was that why he had

come? For what reason should this uninvited guest stop there in the lobby? Like the nocturnal visitor, I stood motionless, for I was paralysed with horror. I wanted to cry out but my tongue cleaved to the roof of my mouth. I wanted to open the door, but my feet seemed glued to the boards. Nothing but the panels of my bedroom door separated me from the intruder, but outside "he" stood, motionless, while I stood, palsied, within.

Then came a stroke from the belfry. A quarter past eleven. The sound relaxed my tension. I could move once more, and I wrenched the door open.

Yes, it was he, my teacher, holding a candlestick. The draught from the opening door distorted the flame of the candle, and his shadow reeled across the wall like a drunkard. At sight of me, he shrank together like one who is roused from sleep by a cold blast of air, and, hardly awake, shivering, pulls the bed-clothes more closely round him. Then he stepped back, and, from the guttering candle, grease trickled over his hand. I was terribly alarmed.

"What's the matter?" I stammered.

He looked at me without speaking, came into the room, and placed the candlestick on the chest of drawers. There the flame steadied itself, and the barlike play of the shadows ceased. After a while he muttered:

"I wanted . . . I wanted . . ."

Words failed him. He looked like a thief caught red-handed. The situation was intolerable, we stood confronting one another, both overwhelmed with anxiety, I shivering in my nightshirt, he confused and shame-faced.

Suddenly he pulled himself together, and came up to where I stood. He smiled—an evil, faunlike smile. His eyes glittered, while his lips were tightly pressed together. His face was like a grinning mask. Then he spoke once more.

"What I wanted to say was . . . that my familiarity was a mistake. . . . Better not . . . Not suitable between a student and his teacher. You understand? . . . We must keep our distance . . . keep our distance . . ."

He looked at me as if he hated me; he seemed filled with malice; his hand was like a vulture's claw. I drew away from him. Was he mad? Was he drunk? He stood there, his fists clenched now, as if he wanted to hurl himself upon me or strike my face.

This horrible ordeal lasted but a moment. Then his expression of inveterate hostility vanished. He turned on his heel; muttered something that sounded like an apology; picked up the candlestick. A black and servile devil, his shadow leapt up the wall again, and ushered him through the doorway. He was gone ere I could say a word. The door slammed behind him, and the stairs creaked as he went quickly and resolutely down.

Shall I ever forget that night? Anger alternated with despair. Thoughts shot up in my mind like rockets, and exploded into nothingness. "Why does he torture me?" I asked myself again and again. "Why does he hate me so much that he creeps upstairs to my room at night simply in order to show me his furious hostility?" What could I have done to arouse this feeling? What ought I to do now? How could I placate him when I did not know what my offence had been? I tossed restlessly in my bed, jumped up, lay down again; I could not rid myself of the spectral vision—my teacher, loathing my presence, turning away from me, leaving me, and, behind him, his huge shadow moving grotesquely along the wall.

In the morning, when I woke after a brief and uneasy slumber, my first thought was that I must have been dreaming. Yet there, on the chest of drawers, were gouts of candle grease to convince me that my memories were

those of real happenings. The thought of the furtive nocturnal visitor still stalked through the sunlit room.

I did not go out that morning, for I was afraid of meeting him. I tried to work, to read or to write; in vain! I was so shaken by my experiences that my hands trembled like aspen leaves. What was I to do? Oh, what was I to do? My head ached as I thought the matter over again and yet again. Of one thing I was sure, that I could not bear to meet him until I felt stronger. I lay down once more, hungry, derelict, unwashed. Once more I pondered the situation. Where was he now? What was he doing? Was he, too, in torment?

I was still lying in dull misery when it struck noon and at length I heard footsteps on the stair. I was filled with alarm. But the tread was light and swift. Someone knocked at the door. I got up, but did not open it.

“Who is it?”

“Why don’t you come down to dinner?” His wife’s voice asked the question in a tone of annoyance. “Are you ill?”

“No, no,” I hastened to protest. “I’ll be down in a moment.”

What could I do but dress as quickly as possible and go downstairs? I clung to the banister. . . .

I entered the dining-room. Only two places were set, and at one of them she was sitting. She asked gently:

“Why didn’t you come down before?”

His place was empty. I felt the blood rush to my head. What was the meaning of his absence? Was he as loath to meet me as I was to meet him? Was he ashamed of himself, or was it that he would no longer sit at table with me? At last I summoned up courage to ask whether the professor was not coming to dinner. She looked at me in astonishment.

"Didn't you know that he had gone away this morning?"

"Gone away," I stammered. "Where to?"

Her face darkened.

"He did not think fit to tell me. I suppose he's gone on one of his usual jaunts." Then she looked at me questioningly. "But how is it that *you* didn't know? He went up to see you last night. I supposed it had been to say good-bye. How extraordinary that he did not tell you!"

"Tell *me*!" With this cry, the stored tensions of the last few hours broke loose. I sobbed, and then blubbered like a child. The tears ran down my face. The outburst was a relief, but at the same time I felt horribly ashamed of myself.

"What on earth is the matter with you?" She came over to me, and led me to the sofa. "Lie down," she said. "Pull yourself together." She stroked my hands, then my hair, while I continued to sob. "Don't distress yourself, Roland. I know all about it. I have seen it coming." She went on stroking my hair. Then her voice grew hard. "Yes, I know all about it! He can flurry and perplex! Who should know better than I? I wanted to warn you when I saw how you were coming to lean on him who is himself so unstable. You don't know him, for you are blind. You are nothing but a child. Even to-day, you don't understand. Or perhaps you have just begun to understand? If so, all the better both for him and for you."

She was leaning over me, and as if in the depths of an abyss I heard her words sink down towards me and felt the soothing touch of her hands. It was good to know that someone commiserated me; it was good, too, to be caressed once more by a woman's hand, though the caress was almost motherly. It was so long, so long, since I had known such a touch, and now, even in my

misery, a woman's kindly interest brought consolation. How ashamed I was for having given way! At the thought, I lost control once more. In a flood of words, I told her how he had treated me. How he had alternately repelled and allured me; how hard he was to me now, though I had surely given him no cause for offence; how he was a torturer whom I nevertheless loved, whom I lovingly hated and hatingly loved. As I spoke, my excitement grew, so that she was hard put to it to tranquillize me once more. At length I grew calm. She sat in reflective silence. I saw that she understood everything, understood more than I did.

When the silence had lasted for a few minutes, she stood up, saying:

"Well, you have been a child long enough. Now you must be a man. Sit down and eat your dinner. Nothing tragical has happened. Only a misunderstanding which time will clear up." She went on impetuously: "It must be cleared up. I shall not let him trouble you in this way any longer. He must learn to control himself a little. You are too good to become a pawn in his game. I shall have a word with him about the matter. Leave it all to me. What you've got to do now is to eat your dinner."

I obeyed. With a somewhat forced fluency, she went on talking of indifferent matters, and I was grateful to her for behaving as if she had forgotten my childish outburst. Next day, being Sunday, she said, she had arranged an excursion with Instructor W. and his young wife. They were going to a lake not far away. I must come too. It would do me good to forget my books for a day. I was suffering from overwork. A long walk and a swim would set me to rights in no time.

I promised to come. Anything was better than loneliness. Anything to get away from the ceaseless round of distressing thoughts.

"Don't stay frowsting in your room all the afternoon!

Walk till you're tired out. Go and enjoy yourself somewhere."

Queer, I mused, how she reads my thoughts. She, though she is really a stranger to me, knows what I want and understands what hurts me, whereas he, the sage, misunderstands me and wounds me.

I said that I would certainly take her advice. As I looked at her thankfully, I saw a new expression on her face. Hitherto it had seemed mocking, a little arrogant, like that of a rather impudent young man. Now she was kindly and affectionate, as I had never seen her before. It was natural that I should ask myself: "Why does he never look at me so kindly? Why does he never know when he hurts me? Why has he never stroked my hair tenderly, as she did just now?" At the thought, I kissed her hands gratefully, but she drew them away, almost violently.

"Don't distress yourself any more," she said, her voice breaking a little. Then her expression hardened. Drawing herself up, she said in a low tone: "Believe me, he is not worth it."

It was not much more than a whisper, but it planted a new sting.

My conduct that afternoon and evening was so preposterous that for years I could not bear to think of it. Whenever I began to do so, an inward censorship drove it out of my mind. To-day I am no longer ashamed of my asinine behaviour, for now I understand the doings of the passionate youth who wanted, with a rush, to skate over the thin ice of his own feelings.

I contemplate myself as a figure at the end of an immensely long passage, a figure I look at through a telescope. I see the youth, crushed and despairing. He goes upstairs to his room, hardly knowing what he intends to do when he gets there. He changes his clothes, assumes

a new and resolute demeanour, vigorously strides down the stairs and along the street. Yes, it was I. I recognize myself. I know all the thoughts of that young idiot, that poor young devil. I remember how he drew himself up before the mirror and said to himself:

"A fig for him! He can go to hell for all I care! Old fool! She is right. Enjoy yourself! Have a good time! That's the thing to do."

Such was the spirit in which I went forth. I had thrown off my burden—so I persuaded myself. Really, I was a coward at heart, a coward running away from the conviction that my cheerfulness was not cheerful at all, and that I was chilled to the heart. I remember how I marched forward, gripping my stick firmly, glaring provocatively at every student I met. I was in a quarrelsome mood, and wanted to vent my spleen on the first comer. Luckily nobody marked me! I flaunted along to a café which many of my comrades of the afternoon discussions frequented, prepared to seat myself uninvited at their table, and find quarrel in a straw. Once again my cantankerous intention was foiled. It was a lovely afternoon, and most of them were out of doors. The two or three exceptions greeted me in a friendly way and did not give me the faintest pretext for a broil. Being thus disappointed; I made but a brief stay, and moved on to a tavern in the suburbs, a haunt I should flatter if I said that its reputation was dubious. It was a place where, to the drone of music discoursed by a quartet of women players, the scum of the town gathered for sordid amusement amid the fumes of beer and tobacco. I tossed off two or three glasses in rapid succession; invited a couple of painted wenches to sit down beside me; found a morbid pleasure in making myself conspicuous. In this little town, every one knew me by sight; every one knew that I was Professor K.'s favourite pupil; and the young women's looks and behaviour made their profession un-

mistakable. Thus I could enjoy the crazy pleasure of compromising both myself and (as I fancied in my stupidity) him. "I will let people see that I don't care a snap of the fingers for him"; thus ran my thoughts. That was why, in full view of all, I paid shameless court to one of these huzzies. I had begun by being intoxicated with rage and resentment. To this a less figurative intoxication was quickly superadded, for we mixed our drinks wildly, consuming beer, wine, and brandy in rapid succession. So riotous did we become that we upset some of the chairs, and our neighbours drew cautiously away. This did not abash me in the least. "I'll show him how little I care! I'm not downhearted; very much the reverse!" I banged the table with my fist so that the glasses clinked, and I shouted for more wine.

In the end, I went out arm-in-arm with the two girls, one on either side, and walked down the main street, where, at that hour (it was now nine o'clock) students and lassies, shopkeepers and soldiers, were taking their evening stroll and comfortably chatting over the day's events. A riotous trio, we reeled along the crown of the causeway, creating such a disturbance that at length a policeman intervened and sternly ordered us to behave ourselves. My memories are vague as to what happened afterwards. I can only recall that, grown sick of these two drunken trollops, and hardly aware of what I was about, I ransomed myself from them, turned in somewhere for coffee laced with brandy, and then, in front of the university building, delivered a philippic against the professors, to the huge delight of a crowd of students. Next, urged on by an instinctive desire to defile myself and injure him even more, I tried to find my way to a brothel, but, being too drunk to discover what I wanted, in the end I staggered home.

For many hours I was dead to the world. When I awoke, the sun was streaming into the room. At first my thoughts were confused and I was mainly concerned to wonder why I had such a bad headache, and why my mouth was so hot and dry. Then I remembered how I had spent the previous evening, and was ashamed of myself. But I repressed the feeling of shame. I would not be ashamed any more. "It was his fault," so I tried to persuade myself, "all his fault." That was why I had made a fool of myself. Was it not to be expected that a student should go on the burst after his nose had been kept to the grindstone for so many weeks? These exculpatory arguments did not relieve my aching head, and were not very successful in tranquillizing my uneasy conscience. I was in poor case, both mentally and physically, as I went downstairs.

It was strange. I had been thinking chiefly of the excursion planned for the day, but at the door of my teacher's flat his image took possession of my mind once more, and therewith came an uprush of yesterday's pain, yesterday's despair. I entered and his wife came to meet me. She looked at me anxiously. Her expression was compassionate rather than reproachful.

"Why did you behave so foolishly yesterday, Roland? Why do you torment yourself so?"

I was taken aback. I had not expected that she would have heard of my escapade so soon. But she heartened me up.

"To-day, we'll all be sensible. Mr. W. and his wife are coming at ten. We'll set off directly they arrive, have a long row on the lake, and then wash our stupidities away with a good swim."

Eagerly, stupidly, I asked a needless question:

"Has he come back yet?"

She looked at me in silence. I knew that my question was absurd.

Mr. W. was a young physicist. Being a Jew, he was cold-shouldered in the social life of the little university town. Since my teacher and his wife were also ostracized, the two households had drawn together. Mrs. W. was a young woman with an incessant giggle. She was rather stupid, but good company enough for an excursion. During the hour in the train we were eating, chattering, and laughing the whole time. The weeks of unremitting devotion to my labours with my teacher had made me so unused to lively conversation that now it had a most stimulating effect. This cheerful companionship relieved my mind of its gloomy broodings. My headache was passing off. On the way from the station to the lakeside, Mrs. W., who was little more than a girl, challenged me to a race. As soon as I had stretched my limbs in this amusement, I was once more the vigorous young daredevil of former days.

We hired two boats. I sculled mine, with my teacher's wife steering. In the other, the young couple were at the oars. Directly we pushed off, we began to vie with one another for speed, and naturally I was at a disadvantage. But I put my back into it, and, being a good oarsman, managed to keep the lead. There was a perpetual fire of chaff exchanged between the boats; and, sweating under the July sun, we rowed as if our lives depended upon it. Our destination was a wooden tongue of land thrusting out into the lake. My companion, who had entered fully into the fun of the race, was delighted that I kept the lead, and laughed triumphantly when our boat was the first to reach the shore.

When I landed, I was intoxicated by this exercise, by the fresh air and the sunshine, by my little triumph in the race; but I was exhausted by my unwonted exertions, my heart was beating furiously, and my clothes were drenched with perspiration. Mr. W. was in no better case. Our companions, instead of praising us for

our doughty deeds, chaffed us unmercifully because we were panting for breath and because our appearance was so pitiable. It was now time for a swim. A convenient bush close to the water's brink enabled us to observe the proprieties while we undressed. The women were quicker than we men, and were first in the water, whither Mr. W., who was less exhausted than I had been by our feats, promptly followed them. There was no hurry, so I lay down in the shade for a few minutes, and soon began to feel better.

Then came a call from the water:

"Roland, Roland! Aren't you coming? We want to have a swimming-race."

I did not stir. I felt as if I could lie where I was for a thousand years, fanned by the breeze, and with enough sunshine flickering through the leaves to keep me from growing chilly. More laughter from the lake, and then the voice of Mr. W.:

"He's gone on strike! We seem to have done for him. Do go and fetch the lazy beggar."

I heard splashing close at hand, and then the sound of her voice.

"Come on, Roland! Do come quickly! We'll show them we can outswim them!" I did not answer. It amused me to make her hunt for me. "Where on earth have you got to?" I heard the patter of her bare feet on the strand, and then she stood before me, her wet bathing dress clinging to her slender, boyish form. "There you are! Why are you so lazy? The others are swimming right across, and have nearly reached the island."

I stretched luxuriously, saying:

"I'm very comfortable here. Coming later."

Putting her hands up as a speaking trumpet, she shouted to the swimmers:

"He won't come!"

An answering shout from Mr. W.:

"Drag him into the water, the sluggard."

"Do come along," she said impatiently. "You're my champion, and you must not disgrace me."

I yawned indolently. Thereupon, half in jest and half annoyed, she broke a switch from the bush, and gave me a light cut with it across the arm, saying:

"Get up, lazybones!"

A weal showed itself on my skin, but still I would not move. I was stubborn, I, too, was now annoyed as well as amused. Growing angry, she said authoritatively:

"Come along, at once!"

When I did not stir, she dealt me a still sharper cut with her switch. I jumped up in a rage, and tried to snatch the switch away from her. She drew back; I seized her wrist. In a moment, we were wrestling for possession of the weapon. I twisted her arm to make her drop the switch. She held it fast, and still tried to draw away from me. Came a sound of tearing, as one of the shoulder straps of her bathing dress gave way under the strain, so that the front of the garment dropped on that side, showing one of her breasts, with its rosy blossom in the centre. I could not choose but see. The sight set my nerves tingling, and at the same time abashed me; I let go of her wrist. She turned away with a blush to make a temporary repair with a hairpin, while I stood in embarrassed silence. She, likewise, said not a word. From that moment a restless uneasiness entered into our relations.

"Hullo! Hullo! Where are you?" The voice resounded across the lake from the islet.

"I'm coming," I called back, and plunged into the water. I was all right again now, and thoroughly enjoyed the swim. Mr. W. and I had many races, and then we swam back to our improvised dressing-room. The others had been beforehand with us, and were already un-

packing the baskets we had brought for the picnic. All four of us were as merry as could be; but she and I felt it difficult to meet one another's eyes.

The afternoon passed away quickly. We were pleasantly tired, and lazed most of the time away, padding about the lake and strolling through the wood. Mr. W. and his young wife made love to one another, and sought opportunities for being alone. This pairing off was not wholly agreeable to myself and my companion, who were still troubled with memories of the forenoon incident. We were glad enough when the time came for the homeward journey.

Our companions bade farewell to us at the door. Directly I entered the flat, the thought of my teacher once more took possession of my mind, and I wondered whether he had returned. As if reading my thought, she said:

"We'll see if he's back yet."

The study was empty. Bitter feelings flooded my mind once more. Why had he gone? Why had he forsaken me? I was full of resentment, full of a confused longing to hurt him as much as he had hurt me.

His wife had followed me into the study.

"You'll stay to supper? You ought not to be alone this evening."

How did she know that I dreaded the empty room upstairs, the creaking staircase, the ceaseless iteration of distressing thoughts? She could read all that was flitting through my brain, could discern my every feeling.

I was anxious, was afraid of myself and of my passions. I wanted to refuse the invitation to supper, but lacked courage to do so.

I have always detested adultery. Not because I was ever strait-laced, not from prudery or exaggerated respect for conventional morality; not mainly because

adultery is in most cases a theft in the dark. My objection is due to the fact that at such moments almost every woman betrays her husband's innermost secrets; becomes a Delilah who discloses to a stranger, discloses to her lover, the mysteries of her husband's strength or weakness. What seems to me treason is, not that women give themselves, but that a woman is prone, when she does so, to justify herself to herself by uncovering her husband's nakedness, exposing it to the inquisitive and scornful gaze of a stranger.

In the blindness of my despair, I sought refuge in the embraces of my teacher's wife. It began as a consolatory caress; then, speedily and almost unawares, it slipped into something more ardent. But that is not the action which, in retrospect, I regard as the basest of my life. I can hardly feel that we were accountable for what we did. We slipped, all unwitting, into a burning gulf. What I blame myself for is that amid passionate kisses I allowed her to betray her husband's confidence, to disclose the intimacies of her married life. Why did I let her tell me that for years he had shunned all bodily relations with her? Why did I allow her to make certain horrible innuendoes? Why did I not imperiously forbid her to blab this secret? The fact was that I wanted to know the secret. I was so eager for evidence of his sin against me, against her, against everyone, that I was more than willing to listen to her confession—to let her complain to me of neglect which was so like my own suffering. Thus it came about that in our common hatred we did something which wore the mask of love. At the very time when our bodies were craving for one another and finding one another, we continued to think and to speak of nothing but him. Again and again, what she said cut me like a knife, and I was bitterly ashamed that I should seem to love where I loathed. My body was no longer subject to my will. It took its own frenzied

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and lustful course. Shuddering I kissed the lips which were betraying the person who was dearer to me than aught else in the whole world.

Next morning I slunk upstairs, overwhelmed with bitterness and shame. As soon as the warmth of her body ceased to lure my senses, the crude reality and repulsiveness of my treason took possession of my soul. Never again should I be able to look him in the face, never again to touch his hand. It was not he whom I had robbed. I had robbed myself of my own most cherished possession.

There was only one resource. Flight! In a frenzy, I packed my trunks and settled accounts with my landlady. I would vanish out of his life as he had vanished out of mine.

While I was still busied in preparations for departure, I heard the staircase creaking, I heard a well-known footfall.

I must have become deadly pale, for he was startled at my looks.

"What's the matter, my lad? Are you ill?"

I drew back. I waved him away when he came nearer.

"What's the matter?" he repeated in alarm. "Has anything happened to you? Or . . . or . . . are you still angry with me?"

I went over to the window and stared out. I could not face him. His affectionate tone pierced me to the heart. I was ashamed, was burning with shame, was near to fainting with the intensity of my shame.

He stood there wondering and perplexed. At length in low tones, little more than a whisper, came a strange question:

"Has anyone been telling you something about me?"

Without turning round, I made a gesture of negation, but he persisted.

"Tell me, don't hide it from me. Has anyone, no matter who, told you something about me?"

Again I denied it, and he did not know what to make of me. Then he became aware of my preparations for departure.

"Are you going away, Roland?"

At last I was able to speak.

"Yes, I must go away. I'm sorry . . . I can't talk about it. . . . I will write."

He stood rigid. Then the customary expression of weary resignation returned.

"Perhaps it is better so, Roland. Yes, yes, it is better for you and for all of us. But before you leave, I should like to have one more talk with you. Come this evening at seven o'clock, the usual time, and we will bid one another farewell, man to man. No running away, no writing instead of speaking. That would be childish and unworthy. Besides, what I want to say to you cannot be written. It must be spoken. You will come, won't you?"

I nodded assent, still looking away from him and out of the window. I could not see the glory of the morning. There was a thick, dark veil between me and the world.

At seven that evening I entered the beloved room for the last time. The curtains were drawn, and only a little of the remaining daylight filtered through their thick folds. In the dim light from the deeply shaded reading-lamp on the table, I could just see the white glimmer of the marble busts and a faint reflexion in the glass fronts of the bookcases. The place was full of memories. Here I had first realized the magical power of words; first experienced the rapture, the ecstasy, of the things of the spirit. How vivid still is my mental picture of the dim interior during that hour of parting! I see that revered figure of my teacher. He rises slowly from his chair, and

the wraithlike form comes to meet me. His noble forehead gleams white in the gloom, and is nobly crowned with his abundant white locks. Now his hand seeks mine. He is so close to me that I can see his eyes looking eagerly into mine. He takes me by the arm and guides me to a chair.

"Sit there, dear Roland, and let us talk plainly to one another as men should. I cannot insist, of course; but surely it would be better that we should clear up matters before you leave? Tell me, then, why are you going away? Are you angry with me because of what happened the other night?"

I made a hasty gesture of denial. The thought that he, whom I had betrayed, should take upon himself the blame for my departure was horrible to me!

"Have I wittingly or unwittingly done anything else to offend you? I know that my behaviour is eccentric at times. I know that I have irritated you, tormented you, in spite of myself. I have never thanked you sufficiently for all your kindly help. I know that well enough; have known it always, even at the very times when I was wounding you. Is that why you are going? Tell me, Roland. Please tell me, so that there shall be no concealments between us when we part."

Again I shook my head. I could not speak. Hitherto his voice had been firm; now it began to falter a little.

"Or—I must ask you once more—has anyone told you something about me; something you find base, repulsive; something which has made you despise me?"

"No! No! No!" The words burst from me like sobs. I, despise him!

A shade of irritation crept into his voice.

"What is it then? What can it be? Are you tired of the work? Or is there some other attraction? A woman! Is it a woman?"

I said nothing. This time my silence must have had a different, an affirmative complexion. He bent forward, and, speaking gently, almost in a whisper, without a trace of excitement or anger, said:

"Is it a woman? Is it my wife?"

Still I said nothing. He understood. Now, surely, there would be an outburst. He would rail at me, perhaps strike me. I think I almost longed for him to do so. I was a thief, a traitor, and the best thing would be for him to scourge me out of his desecrated home.

Strange! He made no movement. After a pause for reflection, he murmured (and his tone was one of relief):

"I might have thought of that!"

He paced twice up and down the room. Then he stopped in front of me and said in a tone that sounded contemptuous:

"So that is what has cut you to the heart! Has she not told you that she is free to do what she likes, to take whatever she pleases; that I have no rights over her? No right to forbid her anything, nor the slightest wish to do so. Why should she want to rein her passions in? For whose sake? You are a handsome lad, you know. You have been living in intimate companionship with us. How could she help falling in love with you? How could she help it? I myself . . ."

His voice trembled; he paused for a moment. He bent near to me, so that his breath fanned my cheek. I felt his corial scrutiny enveloping me. He was so close that, dark though it was, I could see in his eyes the strange light I had noticed a few times before. Closer and closer he drew. Then he whispered:

"I, too, have fallen in love with you, Roland."

Did I start? Did I involuntarily draw back? I must have given a sign of surprise, must have made an initial movement of retreat, for he staggered away from me like

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one who has been repelled. The light died out of his eyes.

"Do you despise me now," he asked gently. "Do I seem loathsome to you?"

Why could I not utter a word? Why did I sit there mumchance, unfeeling, embarrassed, stupefied? Why did I not answer him affectionately, and relieve him of his false impression? My thoughts were in a whirl. It was as if I had suddenly been given the key to a cipher, had been furnished with the explanation of a number of previously incomprehensible messages. Now, at last, I understood his tender advances and brusque withdrawals. I understood his visit to me in the night, and that what I had taken for anger had really been intense disappointment at my lack of comprehension. Love? I had always known that he loved me, with a shy and tender affection, which sometimes made advances and was sometimes vigorously restrained. The signs of this affection, every gleam of its radiance, had been a delight to me. But love is a word of many meanings. As it now came to me, from his mouth, and when for the first time I realized what he meant, I was filled with a horror which was sweet as well as horrible. I was humiliated by his humiliation. My sympathy with him was overwhelming. Yet there I sat, abashed, perplexed, trembling, and could find no words in which to answer his passionate avowal.

He collapsed into a chair.

"It seems so dreadful to you, so dreadful," he murmured. "You find it impossible to forgive me, now that I have told you, after constraining myself to silence for so long. It is better that you should know. To tell you is a relief. The suppression has been too much for me. Better the end of all things than everlasting silence and concealment."

Sadly and tenderly came the words. They pierced me

to the heart. I was ashamed to sit there in cold silence, facing the man from whom I had received so much and who was now abasing himself before me. I yearned to say a word of consolation, but my tremulous lips were refractory and would not shape themselves for speech. I must have looked a pitiable object, for, even amid his own despair, he tried to encourage me.

"Pull yourself together, Roland, there's a good lad. Does it really seem so horrible to you? The worst is over now. I have told you. Let us bid one another farewell in seemly fashion, as becomes two men, two friends."

Still I could not find an answer. Then he touched my arm.

"Come, dear Roland, sit close to me. I feel easier now that you know, now that the position has at length been cleared up. At first I used to be afraid that you would guess how much I cared for you. Then I hoped that you would guess it, so that I might be spared this confession. Well, it's over now, and I can talk freely to you. You have been dearer to me than anyone else in all these years. I have never loved anyone as I love you. No one before has stirred my nature to the depths. That is why, before you leave, you shall know more of me than anyone else has ever known. Throughout the many hours we have spent together, your dumb questioning has really been vocal to me. You shall know the story of my life. Do you want to know it?"

Still I could not speak, but he read my answer.

"Come close, quite close. What I have to say cannot be said out loud."

I leaned forward piously—that is the only word. After I had waited expectantly for a moment, looking at him with tense interest, he stood up again.

"No, that won't do. I can't speak when you are looking at me."

He stretched forth his hand towards the reading-lamp

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and pressed the extinguisher. There was a click, and the room was in darkness.

I felt that he was near. At times I could even feel his breath. Out of the darkness came his voice as he told me the story of his life.

Since the evening when the man I so greatly revered disclosed to me the secret of his life, since that evening forty years ago, how trivial and insignificant have seemed the tales in written books, the tragedies which actors present upon the boards! Is it through indolence, cowardice, or shortness of sight, that they are one and all content to portray the brightly lighted margin of life, where the senses disport themselves in the open, and pay due respect to the rules and regulations? Is that why they never plumb the depths, explore the cellars of the heart, where the formidable realities of passion, phosphorescent in the obscurity, have their abode, tearing and rending one another, coupling and reproducing their kind, in their manifold fantastical forms? Do the fire and destructiveness of the elemental impulses terrify these authors? Do they shrink from the stench of burning blood? Do they fear to soil their delicate hands by touching the weaknesses of mankind? Or is it, perchance, that their gaze, habituated to the strident light of day, is unable to pierce the gloom of such perilous abysses? Yet to the sage, no pleasure can be compared with that which is to be found in the revealing of hidden things; no thrill is so powerful as the one which danger gives; and no distresses are more sacred than those which shame forbids the sufferer to reveal.

Now a fellow-mortal was stripping himself bare before me; was rending himself open, eager to show me the painful workings of his tortured heart. The narrator, like a flagellant, found a savage pleasure in open confession of what he had been concealing from the world,

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for years. Only one who for years upon years has kept a shameful secret to himself, can know so masterful, so inexorable, so intoxicating an urge to avowal. Fragment by fragment, the man before me was wrenching the life from his breast, and for the first time I (little more than a boy) gazed into the unfathomable depths of human feeling.

At the outset his voice floated uncorporeally through the room—a vague mist of excitement, an obscure intimation of secret happenings. Yet in this deliberate control, I sensed the coming storm, just as the tensely restrained notes of an adagio give the auditor foreknowledge of the furioso which is to come. The imagery of the recital was increasingly tinged with passion.

First came the picture of a boy, timid and retiring, one who rarely had a word to say to his school-fellows, but who from time to time was impelled by forces he did not understand to make affectionate advances towards one or other of them, mostly towards those who were distinguished by good looks. One of them would brutally repel an attempted caress; another would wound him no less deeply by an offensive epithet. Worse still, those to whom he had made such advances, blabbed to the others. The result was ostracism. Going to school in the morning became a daily crucifixion. Nights were as bad as days. At first the nature of his desires was only revealed to him fully in his dreams, though the attitude of his schoolfellows towards the half-formed expression of these desires, made him regard his longings as mad, vicious, and criminal. He was filled with shame, and loathing of himself.

The voice in the darkness grew hesitant, and seemed on the point of fading away into silence. Then, after a sigh, it gathered strength once more. New images stalked before me. The boy had become a student at the University of Berlin, and now at length, in the sub-

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terranean recesses of the great city, he could find opportunities for the gratification of the desires which had so long been repressed. But the gratification was soiled with disgust, poisoned with anxiety. How horrible were these furtive encounters at some dark street corner, in the shadow of a railway arch; how fugitive and pitiful the pleasure, how fearful the danger! Often enough, the outcome was an attempt at blackmail. Such relief as he could find had to be sought on dimly lighted paths leading between abysses. His days were spent in the lucid delights of the student whose mind is awakening to the joys of the intellectual life. But when evening came, his passions would drive him into the purlieus of the town, would make him seek the company of men of evil reputation, questionable shapes fleeing the sight of a policeman's helmet. Sometimes the places of assignation were in evil-smelling taverns whose suspicious doors would grant admission only to those who gave a significant smile.

He had become an instructor now, and must bend his will more firmly than ever to the task of keeping the decent formalities of his daily life unsmirched by any splashes from the mire of the underworld. Again and again, he made desperate attempts to control his passions; again and again they drove him back into dangerous courses. This went on for ten, twelve, fifteen years of nerve-racking struggle, the enjoyment of Dead Sea fruit, ceaseless shame.

In the middle thirties, he made a desperate attempt to lead the life of normal humanity. He became acquainted with a girl who, unwittingly attracted by the mystery of his nature, took a strong liking for him. She was of boyish type, with much of the pleasing impudence of a youth, and these characteristics deceived his senses. After a brief period of intimacy, he believed he had overcome his antagonism towards women. Hoping that

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a normal relationship would put an end, once for all, to his aberrant impulses, and eager to bind himself for life, he promptly married the girl—having first made full confession. For a few weeks, he was happy in the belief that the road leading back into the underworld was permanently barred. All too soon it became plain to him that he was mistaken. Thenceforward his wife, disillusioned like himself, was for him nothing more than the mask of respectability, under cover of which he could indulge in the abnormal tendencies which had regained their ascendancy.

Now, he was appointed to a position in which his abnormal trend became a torment. His professorial duties brought him into perpetual contact with an unending succession of young men. As a further cross in his lot, these ephebes for the most part were devotedly attached to him, without suspecting the face of Eros behind the teacher's mask. It was a delight to them if he laid his hand caressively on their shoulders; they responded by a lavish display of enthusiasm towards which he had to seem indifferent. His position was like that of Tantalus in the land of the shades. He was incessantly warring against his own weakness. When temptation seemed likely to get the better of him, he would take refuge in one of those escapades which had seemed so enigmatical to me. Now I understood the horrible flight from himself, which was but a flight into the horrors of the underworld—a flight into the morass of prostitution as a ghastly substitute for the love that he craved.

In this double life, he had run many risks, but had escaped open scandal. He had not escaped suspicion. Whispers had spread through the little university town. His colleagues began to look at him askance. At length they drew away from him ostentatiously, and left him in chilly isolation. Even in this isolation, even in this

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shunned dwelling of his, he had the feeling that he was always under hostile observation.

He had grown accustomed, almost resigned, to making the best of the antithesis between the day side and the night side of his life, when I crossed his path. Here was a youth who had conceived a passionate admiration for him, who hung upon his every word, was eager for self-immolation. The elder man, overjoyed, and at the same time terrified, felt that he was no longer worthy of the lad's proffered affection. Once again had come a messenger of youth, fair of form and passionate of temperament, burning for him with a spiritual flame, closely bound to him by sympathy, thirsting for responsive affection, and with no inkling of danger. Holding the torch of Eros unawares, bold and unsuspecting as pure Fool Parsifal, he bent over the poisoned wound, ignorant of the charm he exercised and that his advent might bring healing. Thus too late, at eventide, did the long-expected guest enter the house.

With the description of this newcomer, the voice gathered strength. Its sound seemed to shine through the darkness. Passion winged the words with music when the eloquent tongue began to speak of this young man, the long-desired. I thrilled sympathetically, thinking only of my teacher, forgetting myself. Then—the recollection came to me like a blow—I realized that the young and ardent man of whom my teacher spoke, was . . . was indeed . . . myself. I was abashed as I listened, as I contemplated my own portrait seen through his eyes. I looked at myself as if in a mirror of flame, saw my image enveloped in so resplendent a sheen of unsuspected love that the reflexion dazzled me. It was I. I could not help but recognize myself: the eager enthusiasm of my approach; the fanatical longing to be near him; the covetous ecstasy, which was not content with a purely spiritual relationship. I saw the hair-brained youth who,

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ignorant of his own power, had reawakened to life the creative germ in the mind of this weary and solitary thinker, had rekindled the torch of Eros in his soul. With amazement I now perceived how much I had meant to him; I, whose exuberant advances had been a wonder and a wild delight. At the same time I understood what a grip he must have exercised upon his will, to avoid meeting me more than half-way. For, loving me with this pure affection, he was terrified lest he should scare my susceptibilities by the nature of his response to my advances. That was why he had chilled me with cutting sarcasms which were a mask to his real feelings; that was why he had been so rough in his manner to me at times, treating me in a way which had been a torture to me and an even greater torture to himself. At length I understood all that he had suffered when, overmastered by his inner impulses and scarcely aware of what he was doing, he had climbed the creaking stairway to my room, and then given the lie to his affection in words that had wounded me so deeply, words that he had uttered in the hope of saving our friendship.

This voice in the darkness, this voice in the darkness, how it pierced the recesses of my heart! There was a tone in it such as I had never heard before and have never heard since, a tone from the depths far removed from the trivial round of everyday existence. Only once in his life could a man speak thus to another, and then for ever hold his peace—the swan-song of popular legend.

The voice ceased. I knew he was close to me. I had merely to stretch out my hand, and I should touch him. I yearned to comfort him.

He moved towards the table. He relighted the lamp. He came slowly towards me, an old man, very tired.

“Farewell, Roland. This is the end. I am glad you

I
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came, but it is better for us both that you should go. Farewell!"

It was difficult to tear myself away. I stayed on, needlessly prolonging the agony of parting. He dropped heavily into a chair, his back towards me, staring into vacancy. Gradually his head drooped forward, until at length, with a sudden collapse, his forehead sank on to his arms which lay crossed before him on the writing-table.

A wave of intense compassion overwhelmed me. I stole nearer. Thereupon he sat up, still with his back towards me, and, covering his face with his hands, whispered brokenly:

"Go! Go! Come no nearer! For God's sake, go; go at once!"

I never saw him again. He never wrote to me. His great work was never published. I doubt if any one in the world except myself remembers his name. Yet even to-day I feel, as I felt in youth, that he was more to me than father and mother, more to me than wife and children; that I loved him more than anyone else in the world.

THE BURIED CANDELABRUM



IN the Circus Maximus, on a fine June day in the year 455, a combat between two tall Heruli and a sounder of Hyrcanian boar had reached its sanguinary close when, in the third hour of the afternoon, disquiet spread among the thousands of onlookers. At first it was only those seated near the imperial box who noticed that something was amiss. A horseman, dusty and travel-stained by a long ride, descended the stairway with its statues on either side, and approached the bedizened dais where Maximus lolled, surrounded by courtiers. The Emperor listened to the tidings, sprang to his feet, and—disregarding the convention which forbade him to leave while the games were in progress—hastened out, followed by his train. The senatorial benches likewise and those of the other dignitaries quickly emptied. The cause must be grave indeed for such a breach of etiquette. Naturally the common folk grew uneasy.

Attempts were made to distract the attention of the crowd. Trumpet blasts announced a new “turn”. The grid rose. A roar issued from the dark interior as a black-maned lion was goaded into the arena to encounter the short swords of a troop of gladiators. To no purpose. The show had lost interest. Waves of alarm, crowned by a spume of anxious and excited faces, spread irresistibly from tier to tier. Quitting their places, the plebs gathered in knots and pointed to the empty seats of the mighty; they questioned one another eagerly; catcalls were heard; the amusement had ceased to amuse; and at

length (how or where started no one knew) a rumour ran through the vast amphitheatre, a name of ill-omen, "The Vandals!"—"The Vandals!"

Genseric and his men, the dreaded pirates of the Mediterranean, had landed at Portus, to attack the heart of the Empire. Vast numbers of them were already marching along the Via Portuensis. "Vandals, Vandals." The whisper became a shout and changed itself into the still more terrible word, "Barbarians, Barbarians." Hundreds screamed it, thousands screamed it, in the huge circus. Panic stricken, disorderly, the crowds raced along the stone courses toward the exits, driven by fear like leaves before the wind. Janitors, marshals, and soldiers of the watch forsook their posts, fighting through the press with fists, staves, and swords; women and children were trampled under foot; the outlets were funnels, each containing a mass of shrieking humanity. Within a few minutes the enormous edifice of stone and marble was empty, save for the corpses of those who had been struck down, or trampled to death. The gigantic oval, still glowing beneath the summer sun, was vacated, save for the lion, whose antagonists (death-defying gladiators though they were) had also fled. Puzzled and forsaken, the black-maned king of beasts once more roared his challenge into the void.

The Vandals were approaching. Messenger after messenger spurred into the imperial city, each bringing worse news than the last. The barbarians had landed from a fleet of a hundred sailing ships and galleys, a lightly equipped and swiftly moving multitude. Cavalry as well as infantry, for white-robed Berbers and Numidians, riders from the nomadic tribes of Northern Africa, were speeding along the road to the capital in advance of their Teutonic allies. On the morrow, or the next day, the whole invading force, fired by the lust for

plunder, would assail the doomed town. The Roman army (captives and mercenaries) was far away, fighting near Ravenna; and the walls of Rome had never been repaired since Alaric breached them. No one dreamed of defence. The minority, who had property to lose as well as life, made ready to escape, loading their valuables into mule-carts, for they hoped to get away with at least some of their possessions. Their hopes were vain. The long-suffering populace rose in wrath against those who had lorded it over them in time of peace and now tried to flee in time of war.

When Maximus, the Emperor, set forth from the palace with such baggage as he had time to get together, curses were volleyed at him and were soon reinforced by deadlier missiles—stones. Growing fiercer, the mob assailed the cowardly deserter and made an end of him with bludgeons and hatchets. The warders followed the customary routine and closed the gates at nightfall. Alas, the shutting of the gates served only to prison fear within the city. Like a pestilential vapour, forebodings of a terrible fate hovered over the silent and shadowed houses, while darkness fell like a pall upon the once glorious but now decadent and trembling Rome. Yet the stars shone as usual, serenely indifferent to human woes, and the crescent moon sank tranquilly, as if no barbarian invasion threatened. Sleepless and desperate, the Romans awaited the coming of the Vandals, as a man about to be executed lays his head on the block awaiting the fall of an axe already poised for the stroke.

Slowly, surely, purposefully, victoriously, the main force of the Vandals advanced along the deserted road leading from Portus to Rome. The blond, long-haired Teutons marched in good order, century by century, while in front of them, wheeling and curveting, rode their dark-skinned auxiliaries from the desert, mounted

on thoroughbreds, bare-footed and stirrupless. In the midst of his army was Genseric, King of the Vandals. From the saddle he smiled good-humouredly at his warriors. Now middle-aged, inured to battle from earliest youth, he had learned from his spies that there was no likelihood of serious resistance; that his forces were on their way, not to a strenuous fight, but to a week or two of easy and pleasurable looting.

In truth, no Roman stood to arms. Not until the King reached the gate of the city did anyone attempt to stay his progress. Here there appeared Pope Leo, first of the Leos, Leo the Great, in full pontificals, attended by the senior clergy. Leo hoped to repeat the success of three years earlier, when he had persuaded Attila, King of the Huns, to depart from Italy without sacking Rome. At sight of the imposing greybeard, the club-footed Genseric politely dismounted and limped to meet the Holy Father. But he did not kiss the hand of the priest who wore the Fisherman's ring, nor make obeisance, for, being an Aryan, he looked upon the Pope as a heretic and a usurper. Coldly and unresponsively he listened to the Latin oration, in which Leo begged the Vandal monarch to spare the Holy City. Through an interpreter he replied that, being himself a Christian as well as a soldier, he did not propose to burn and destroy Rome—though Rome herself, ambitious and greedy for power, had razed thousands of cities to the ground. In his magnanimity he would spare the possessions of the Church and the bodies of the women, and would merely have the place looted "*sine ferro et igne*," in accordance with the right of the stronger to work his will upon the vanquished. "But," he said menacingly, as his equerry held the stirrup for him to remount, "you will do well to hearken to my counsel, and open the gates to me without more ado."

His orders were obeyed. Not a spear was pointed,

not a sword brandished. Within the hour Rome was at the mercy of the Vandals. But the victorious raiders did not fling themselves lawlessly upon the defenceless town. They marched in quietly, restrained by Genseric's iron hand, these tall, upstanding, flaxen-haired warriors, striding along the Via Triumphalis, staring curiously at the marble statues whose mute lips seemed to promise such an abundance of loot. His goal was the Palatinum, the imperial residence. He ignored the rows of senators, who had timidly assembled to do him reverence, and he did not even accept a banquet, or give so much as a glance at the splendid gifts which some of the wealthier citizens had brought to appease him. No, what the stern soldier had in mind was how best, most swiftly, and most methodically to get possession of the riches of the capital. Poring over a map, he allotted a century to each district, making the centurions responsible for the good conduct of their men. There was to be no indiscriminate and lawless looting. Genseric had in view a systematic spoliation of Rome. The gates were closed and guarded, the breaches in the walls were manned, that not an ingot or a coin should be removed. Then his men commandeered boats, carts, and beasts of burden, pressing thousands of slaves into the service, to make sure that as speedily as possible the treasures of imperial Rome should be removed to the pirates' lair on the southern coast of the Mediterranean. The work of plunder was carried out methodically, coldly, and noiselessly. For thirteen days the quivering city was disarticulated and stripped bare.

Parties of Vandal warriors went from house to house, from temple to temple, each detachment led by a nobleman and accompanied by a clerk. They seized whatever was valuable and transportable; gold and silver chalices, ingots, coins, jewels, necklaces from the Amber Coast, furs from Transylvania, malachite from Pontus, swords

from Persia. Deft workmen were constrained to remove mosaics from the walls of the temples and porphyry slabs from the peristyles of the mansions. All was done according to plan, with the utmost care. With the aid of windlasses the bronze chariot-teams were taken down from the triumphal arches; the interior of the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus was cleared of its valuables; and slaves were sent on to the roof to remove the gilt tiles one by one.

As for the bronze pillars, which were too large to take away intact without the sacrifice of much time and trouble, Genseric had them knocked to pieces or sawn in sunder, that he might ship the metal in fragments, Street after street, house after house, was cleared by these locusts; and when the plunderers had done with the habitations of the living, they turned to break open the abiding-places of the dead. Out of the stone sarcophagi they took the jewelled combs which had been thrust into the now mouldering hair of dead noblewomen; they tore golden anklets and bracelets from skeletons; silver mirrors too, they found, and signet-rings which had been interred with the corpses; they impounded even the obols which, in accordance with ancient custom, had been placed in the mouths of the deceased to pay Charon the ferryman for the voyage across the Styx.

As had been arranged by the King, the booty was piled in orderly heaps. The golden-winged Nike lay prostrate between a gem-studded casket containing the bones of a saint and an ivory dice-box that had belonged to a lady of rank. Silver ingots were piled upon purple garments, and precious glassware jostled fragments of base metal. Each article thought worth taking to Carthage was recorded by the clerk on a parchment, not only to keep tally, but to give this wholesale theft a veneer of legality. Followed by his notables, Genseric hobbled through the medley, poking at various objects

with his stick, scrutinizing the jewels, well-pleased, and distributing praise. He was delighted as he watched the heavily freighted carts and the boats deep in the water leave the capital. But no house in the city was fired and there was no bloodshed. Quietly and in regular succession, as in a mine, the loaded wagons and boats went from the town to the harbour and came back empty from Portus to Rome. Never within the memory of man had there been so great a plundering effected in thirteen days as in this bloodless Vandal sack of Rome.

For thirteen days no voice was raised above a whisper in the myriad-housed city, nor did anyone laugh. The lutes hung silent in the dwelling-rooms, and the chanting was stilled in the churches. The only noises were made by the hammers and crowbars of the devastators, the wains that creaked under their load, the oxen that snorted as they tugged, the mules that tightened the traces, the drivers who cracked their whips. Sometimes, indeed, a neglected cur would whine for food, which his master was too busy or too anxious to provide; or the sound of a trumpet would come from the wall, where the guard was being relieved. But in the houses men, women and children held their breath. Rome, which had conquered the world, lay prostrate at a conqueror's feet; and when, at night, the breeze blew through the deserted streets, the sound was like the groans of a wounded man who feels his lifeblood ebbing from his veins.

On the thirteenth evening of the Vandals' plunder-raid, the Jews of the Roman community were assembled in the house of Moses Abtalion, on the left bank of the Tiber, where the yellow river curves slothfully like an overfed serpent. Abtalion was a "small man" among his co-religionists, nor was he learned in the Law, being only a middle-aged craftsman whose hands were stained

by his occupation as dyer; but they had chosen his house for a meeting-place because his workshop on the ground floor was more roomy than the attic chambers in which most of them dwelt. Since the coming of Genseric and his hordes, they had assembled day after day, wearing their white shrouds, to pray in the gloomy shuttered shops, stubborn and almost stupefied, amid rolls of carpet, bales of brightly coloured cloth, and well-filled barrels of oil and wine. So far, the Vandals had not troubled them. Twice or thrice, a century, accompanied by noblemen and clerks, marched through the Jewish quarter, which was low-lying, so that its narrow streets showed abundant traces of repeated inundations, and walls and flagstones sweated damp. One disdainful glance sufficed to convince the treasure-hunters that they would waste their pains here. No peristyles paved with marble, no triclinia glittering with gold, no bronze statues or costly vases. The Vandals did not tarry, but went elsewhere in search of spoil.

Nevertheless the hearts of the Roman Jews were heavy. Generation after generation, ever since the Diaspora, these exiles from the Holy Land had found that disaster to the country of their adoption betokened disaster to them also. When fortune smiled, the Gentiles forgot them or paid them little heed. The princes wore sumptuous clothing and gave themselves up to their craze for architecture and display; while the coarser lusts of the mob were satisfied with the chase and gambling and the unceasing round of gladiatorial shows. But always, when trouble came, the cry was "Blame the Jews." It was unlucky for the Jews when the Gentiles among whom they lived sustained a defeat; bad for them when a town was sacked; bad for them when a pestilence broke out. No matter what evil should befall, it would be laid to their charge. To rebel against this injustice was futile, for they were few and weak, no longer men of war as

their valiant forefathers had been. Their only resource was prayer.

Throughout this fortnight when Rome was being despoiled by the Vandals, the Jews, therefore, prayed evening after evening, and on into the small hours. What else could a righteous man do in an unrighteous and violent world where might was held to be right, than turn away from earth and look to Jehovah for aid? These barbarian invasions had been going on for decades. From the north and the south, from the east and the west they came, fair-haired and dark, speaking divers tongues, but robbers without exception. Hardly was one conquest finished than the next began, for the invaders trod on one another's heels. The ungodly were at war throughout the world, and continued to harry the pious. Jerusalem had fallen, Babylon and Alexandria; now it was Rome's turn. Where the Chosen People sought rest, unrest came; where they desired peace, they were afflicted by war. Who could escape his destiny? In this tormented world, refuge, peace, and consolation could be found only in prayer. Yes, prayer dispelled alarm with words of promise, appeased terror through the chanting of litanies, enabled the heavy-hearted to wing their way Godward. Hence it was meet to pray in time of trouble, and better still to pray when gathered together, for God's good gifts came most abundantly to those who sought them in common.

So the Jews of the Roman confraternity assembled to pray. The pious murmur flowed from their bearded mouths gently and unceasingly, just as outside the windows the current of the Tiber rippled gently and unceasingly past the planking of the levee—eating away the bank wherever it was undefended. The men did not look at one another, and yet their rounded shoulders moved in unison, since the time was set by the familiar words of the psalms they were intoning, the psalms which

their fathers and forefathers had intoned hundreds and thousands of times before them. So automatic was it that they scarcely realized their lips were moving, hardly understood the significance of the words they uttered. The despairful and prayerful monotone issued, as it were, from a trance, from an obscure land of dreams.

Then they came to themselves with a jerk, straightening their bent backs, for the door-knocker had been violently rapped. Even in good times the Jews of the Diaspora were wont to be alarmed by any sudden or unexpected happening. How could good come of it when a stranger demanded admittance in the middle of the night? The murmur ceased, as if cut with shears, so that the plashing of the river sounded louder than before. They listened, their throats tense with alarm. Again the knocker thundered, and an impatient fist banged on the door.

"Coming," answered Abtalion, rising and scuttling forth into the entry. The flame of the wax-candle which was stuck to the table by some of its own meltings flickered as the craftsman threw open the workshop door while the hearts of those present throbbed under stress of fear.

They recovered, however, on recognizing the new arrival. It was Hyrcanus ben Hillel, master of the imperial mint, a man of whom the community was proud, since he was the only Jew who had the right to cross the threshold of the palace. By special favour of the court he was allowed to live beyond Trastevere, and might even wear the coloured robes reserved for Romans of distinction; but now his raiment was torn, and his face besouled.

They crowded round him, eager to hear his tidings, all the more because his expression showed that they were evil.

THE BURIED CANDELABRUM

Hyrcanus ben Hillel drew a deep breath, and struggled vainly to speak. At length he managed to pant:

"Ruin has befallen us, the greatest of disasters. They have found it; they have seized it."

"Found what, Hyrcanus?"—"Seized what?"—A similar cry came from every mouth.

"The Candelabrum, the Menorah. When the barbarians entered the city, I hid it beneath the garbage in the kitchen. Purposely I left the other holy things in the treasury: the Table of Shewbread, the Silver Trumpets, Aaron's Rod, and the Altar of Incense. Too many of the servants in the palace knew about our treasures, and it would have courted a search had I hidden them all. One thing only did I hope to save from among the temple furniture; Moses' Seven-Branched Candlestick, the Lampstand from Solomon's House; the Menorah. The rogues took what I had left for them to see, the room was stripped bare, they had ceased hunting and were about to leave, and I was glad at heart in the conviction that we had saved the Candelabrum, at least. But one of the slaves (a murrain seize him) had watched me hiding it, and betrayed the hiding-place—in the hope of a reward which would enable him to buy his freedom. He showed them, and they discovered it. Now everything is gone which once stood in the Holy of Holies, in the House of Solomon: the Altar and the Vessels and the Mitre of the Priest and the Menorah. This very evening the Vandals are carrying off the Candelabrum to their ships."

For a moment, silence followed. Then came a wailing chorus:

"The Lampstand . . . Woe, and yet again woe. . . . The Menorah . . . God's Seven-Branched Candlestick . . . Woe, woe . . . The Lampstand from God's Altar . . . The Menorah."

The Jews staggered like drunken men; they beat

their breasts; they held their hips and screamed as though in pain; as if struck blind; the reverend elders lamented.

"Silence!" commanded a powerful voice, and the distraught men did as they were bid. He who spoke was the senior member of the community, the oldest and the wisest, the most learned in the Law, Rabbi Eliezer, whom they called *Kab ve Nake*, which being interpreted means "the pure and clear." Nigh upon eighty years of age was he, with a huge snow-white beard. Seamed was his visage by the painful ploughshare of unrelenting thought; but the eyes beneath the bushy brows were bright as ever, and full of kindness. He raised his hand, the skin being yellowed like parchment with the tale of his years, and waved it as if to dispel the clamour and make room for the words he was about to utter:

"Silence!" he repeated. "Children scream in alarm. Grown men consider what is to be done. Let us resume our seats and hold counsel together. The mind is more active when the body is at rest."

Shamefacedly the men sat down on stools and benches. Rabbi Eliezer talked to them in low tones, almost as if communing with himself.

"Indeed we have suffered a terrible misfortune. Long since, the holy furnishings of the Tabernacle were taken away from us, to be kept in the Emperor's treasury, and none of us save Hyrcanus ben Hillel was permitted to set eyes on them. Still, we knew they had been in safe keeping since the days of Titus. In the imperial treasury they were at least close at hand. These Roman aliens seemed more congenial to us when we remembered that the sacred emblems which had wandered for a thousand years—had been in Jerusalem, then in Babylon, had come back thence to Zion—were at rest in the capital of the Empire where we abode, we who had been despoiled of them. No longer were we allowed to lay bread on

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the Table of the Lord, but of this Table we thought as often as we broke bread. We could not kindle the lamps on the Lampstand; but whenever we lighted a lamp we remembered the Menorah, which stood untended and dark in the house of the stranger. The furniture of the Tabernacle was ours no longer, but we were more or less at ease since it was well guarded. Now the wanderings of the Candelabrum are to begin again. It is not, as we had hoped would happen some day, returning to the home of our fathers, but going elsewhere, and who can say whither? Still, let us not complain. Lament is unavailing. Let us bethink ourselves."

The men listened, wordless, with bowed heads. Eliezer, stroking his beard from time to time, went on, again as if talking to himself:

"The Candelabrum is of pure gold, and often have I wondered why God commanded it should be made of such costly metal. Why did he enjoin upon Moses to make it so heavy, of a talent of pure gold, seven-branched, with its knops and its flowers, all of beaten gold. Often I have pondered whether being so valuable did not endanger the Menorah, for wealth attracts evil, and precious things are a lure to robbers. But now I am aware that I was thinking vain thoughts, and that what God commands has a sense and a purpose which pass our shallow understanding. It has now been revealed to me that because they were so precious have these holy things been preserved through the ages. Had they been of base metal, and unadorned, the robbers would have destroyed them unheeding, to make of them chains or swords. Instead they preserved the precious things as precious, though unaware of their holiness. Thus one robber steals them from another, but none ventures to destroy them, and each remove is but a stage in the journey back to God.

"Let us reflect a while. What can barbarians know

of the Menorah? Only what they see for themselves, that it is made of gold. If we could appeal to their cupidity, could offer twice or thrice the value of the gold, perhaps we could buy it back. We Jews are no fighters. Sacrifice alone is our strength. We must send messengers to the dispersed communities of our people, asking them to join forces and purses with us for the redemption of the sacred Candelabrum. This year we must double or triple what we usually contribute for the Temple, stripping the clothes from our backs and the rings from our fingers. We must buy the Menorah, even if we have to pay seven times its weight in pure gold."

He was interrupted by a sigh—from Hyrcanus ben Hillel, who looked up, sad-eyed, and said softly:

"No use, Rabbi; I've tried that in vain. It was my first thought. I betook myself to their valuers and clerks, but they were rude and harsh. Then I forced my way into Genseric's presence and offered to redeem the Lampstand with a great sum. He was wroth, would scarcely listen to my words, and shuffled impatiently with his feet. Thereupon, beside myself, I wrestled with him in speech, assuring him (fool that I was) that the Menorah had once stood in Solomon's Temple, and had been brought back by Titus as the most splendid object with which to grace a triumph. The barbarian monarch laughed scornfully, saying:

"I do not need your money. So much gold have I seized here in Rome that I can pave my stables with it, and have my horses' hoofs set with jewels. If the Seven-Branched Candlestick once stood in King Solomon's Temple, it is not for sale to you or to any other. Titus, you say, had it carried before him here in Rome when celebrating his triumph after the conquest of Jerusalem? Well, it shall be carried before me when I celebrate my triumph in Carthage after the conquest of Rome. If the

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Menorah served your God, it shall now serve the True God. I have spoken. Go!"

"You should not have obeyed, Hyrcanus ben Hillel," protested the assembled Jews. "You should have been firmer."

"Do you think I gave way so readily? I flung myself on the floor in front of him and embraced his knees. But his heart was as hard as were his iron-shod shoes. He kicked me away as contemptuously, as mercilessly as he would have kicked a stone. At a sign from him his menials beat me with staves and thrust me forth. Barely did I escape with life, and not with a whole skin."

Only now did they understand why Hyrcanus ben Hillel's raiment was torn and bedraggled, why his face was bruised and besoiled, and why there was clotted blood on his brow. Voices were stilled. In the silence they could hear from afar the rattle of the carts in which the plunder was being driven away through the night. Then, reverberating from one end of the city to the other, came trumpet-blasts from the departing Vandals. Profound silence followed, while the same thought struck one and all:

"The sack of Rome is finished. The Menorah is lost to us for ever."

Rabbi Eliezer raised his head wearily, and asked:

"To-night the barbarians remove it?"

"Yes, to-night. They are taking the Menorah in a wagon, which is being driven along the Via Portuensis while we sit here. Those trumpets must have been the signal for the rearguard to assemble. To-morrow morning the Lampstand will be shipped."

Eliezer bowed his head once more and seemed to fall into a doze. For a few minutes, beyond question, he was absent-minded, paying no heed to his companions' perturbed glances. At length he looked up and said calmly:

"To-night? Well and good. Then we must go with it."

They gazed at him in astonishment. But the old man repeated, firmly:

"Yes, we must go with it. Our duty is clear. Recall what is prescribed for us in Holy Writ. When the Ark of the Covenant was borne before us, we had to follow; only when the Ark rested, could we rest. If the insignia of God wander, we must wander likewise."

"But, Rabbi, how can we cross the sea? We have no ships."

"Let us make for the coast. It is but one night's march."

Hyrchanus rose to his feet, saying:

"As always, Rabbi Eliezer's words are wise. We must go with the Menorah. 'Tis but another stage of our unending journey. When the Ark of the Covenant moves onward, and the Candelabrum, we must follow, the whole congregation of the Chosen."

Came a plaintive voice from the corner of the room. It was Simeon the carpenter, a hunchback, who trembled with fear:

"But what if the Vandals should seize us? Hundreds, already, have they carried into bondage. They will beat us, will slay us, will sell our children as slaves—and nothing will be gained."

"Silence, poltroon!" rejoined another. "Control your fears. If any one of us is seized, he is seized. If any one of us should be killed, he will die for the holy emblem. We must all go, and we will."

"Yes, all, all," they cried in chorus.

Rabbi Eliezer waved his hand to arrest the clamour. Again he closed his eyes, as usual when he wanted to reflect. After a while he resumed:

"Simeon is right. You do ill to revile him as a coward and a weakling. He is right. We should be foolish to

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venture the lives of the whole confraternity among these nocturnal marauders. Is not life the greatest gift of God, who does not wish the least of his creatures to throw it away? Simeon is right, the barbarians would lay hands on our children, to make bondmen and bondwomen of them across the sea. Neither our young men nor our boys shall go forth with us into the night. But we old men are useless to ourselves and to others. They will not make slaves of us, who cannot pull lustily in their galleys, who have hardly strength to dig our own graves; and whom even death can rob of little. It is for us to go with the furniture of the Tabernacle. Let those only make ready whose age is above three score years and ten."

At the word, the old, those whose beards were white, severed themselves from the rest of the company. There were ten, and when Eliezer, "the pure and clear," joined them, the number was made up to eleven. "The Fathers of our People," thought the younger men, looking at them reverently, the veterans of a generation most of whom had passed away. Rabbi Eliezer detached himself from them once more, to mingle with the young and the middle-aged. He spake:

"We, the elders, are going, and you need not be troubled about our fate. But stay, while I consider. One who is yet a boy must go with us, to bear witness to those of the next generation and that which will follow. We shall not long survive, our light burns low, our course is nearly run, our voices will soon be hushed. Needful is it that one should live on for many years, one who will have set eyes upon the Lampstand from the Altar of the Lord, that in tribe after tribe and in generation after generation knowledge shall endure concerning the most sacred of our treasures, which shall not be lost for ever, but shall move onward upon its eternal pilgrimage. A child, a little boy, too young to understand what he is

doing, must accompany us that he may testify in days to come."

There was silence for a space, while each of his auditors thought of a son whom he dreaded to send forth into the dangers of that night. But Abtalion the dyer did not hesitate long.

"I will fetch Benjamin, my grandson. He is seven, having lived as many years as there are branches on the Menorah. Is not that a sign? Meanwhile prepare for the journey, making free of such victuals as my poor house can offer."

He departed. The elders seated themselves at the table, and the younger men served them with wine and food. Before breaking bread the Rabbi uttered the prayer which their forefathers had repeated thrice every day. Thrice, now, in the thin voices of old age, the others said after Eliezer the heartfelt petition:

"Be merciful, O Lord, unto thy people Israel; in thy loving-kindness restore thy sacred emblem to Zion and bring back to Jerusalem the service of the sacrifice."

Having said this prayer three times, the elders made ready to depart. Calmly and deliberately, as though performing a sacred task, they took off their shrouds and made them into a bundle with their praying-shawls and their phylacteries. The younger men, meanwhile, brought bread and fruit for the journey, and strong staves for support. Each of the intending travellers then wrote upon parchment directions as to the disposal of his property should he fail to return, and these documents were duly witnessed.

Abtalion the dyer, after removing his shoes, mounted the wooden staircase as silently as possible, but he was stout and solidly built, so the treads groaned beneath his weight. Cautiously he lifted the latch and opened

the door that led into the living-room. Since they were poor folk, this was for the joint use of the head of the family and his wife, their son and daughter-in-law, their daughters, and their grandchildren. The shutters were closed, but between the chinks the silver moonbeams made their way mistily into the crowded apartment. While walking on tiptoe Abtalion could see that, for all his precautions, his wife and his son's wife had awakened, and were staring at him in alarm.

"What's the matter?" asked one of them.

Abtalion made no reply, as he groped his way to the left corner at the back, where Benjamin slept. The grandfather leaned solicitously over the pallet. The little boy was sound asleep, but his fists were clenched and his features twitched. He must be having a nightmare. Abtalion stroked his disordered hair, to wake him up; but he slept on, quieted by the caress. The little fists relaxed, so did the lips; the sleeper smiled, and stretched his arms contentedly. Abtalion was remorseful at the thought of having to waken the youngster from what were now pleasant dreams. But, having no choice, he shook the child. Benjamin awoke, terror-stricken. A Jewish child in exile soon learned to dread the unexpected. His father was startled when an unheralded visitor knocked loudly at the door; the elders were startled when a new edict was read in the streets of Rome; they were alarmed when an emperor died and a new one took his place. Every child of the Jewish quarter had come to anticipate evil as the outcome of change. Before he knew his letters and could spell out the shorter words of Scripture, the Hebrew youngster had learned this much—to dread everyone and everything on earth.

Confusedly little Benjamin stared at the nocturnal visitor, and was about to scream when Abtalion clapped a hand upon the opened mouth. Then, recognizing his

grandfather, the child was appeased. Abtalion bent low and whispered:

"Gather up your clothing and your shoes, and come with me. Quietly. No one must hear."

The boy sprang out of bed, reassured and proud. Secrets between him and grandad. That was fine. He asked no questions, but fumbled for the necessary garments and footgear.

They were creeping to the door, when his mother raised her head from the pillow. She sobbed as she asked:

"Where are you taking Benjamin?"

"Peace," answered Abtalion menacingly. "It is not fitting for a woman to question me."

He closed the door behind him. All the women in the upstairs room were awake now. Through the thin door came a buzz of chattering mingled with sobs. As the eleven old men and the child emerged into the street it was obvious that tidings of their strange and perilous mission had soaked through the walls. The alley was alerted. Fears and plaints came from every house. But the elders did not look up at the windows nor yet at the house-doors on either side. Silently and resolutely they set forth. It was close on midnight.

Great was their surprise to find the city gate unguarded. The tucket they had heard had assembled the last of the Vandals. These were now marching westward along the Via Portuensis; but the Romans, behind barred doors, did not yet venture to believe that their troubles were over. Thus the road leading to the harbour was deserted; no wains of packhorses, not a man or a shadow; nothing to be seen but the white milestones shimmering in the moonlight. The pilgrims, therefore, strode unchallenged through the open gate.

"Let us hasten," said Hyrcanus ben Hillel. "The

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carts freighted with plunder must be far on the road to Portus. Perhaps they had already started before the trumpets were sounded. We will speed in pursuit."

They put their best foot foremost, marching three abreast. In the front rank were Abtalion on the left, Eliezer on the right, and between the septuagenarian and the octogenarian tripped the seven-year-old boy, a little frightened by this adventure, sleepy too, but kept awake by excitement. In three more ranks followed the rest of the elders, each gripping his bundle in the left hand, holding his staff in the right, heads bowed as if they were bearing an invisible coffin on their shoulders. The haze of the Campagna di Roma enveloped them. No refreshing breeze dispelled the marshy vapour, which hung heavily athwart the plain with its reek of decaying vegetation, and gave a greenish tinge to the waning moon. It was uncanny, on so suffocating a night, to be striding towards insecurity, past the scattered burial mounds looking in the half-light like dead animals on either side of the way, and past the pillaged houses, emptied of their inhabitants, and with unshuttered windows staring at the strange spectacle of the hoary pilgrims. For a long while, however, there was no hint of danger. The road slumbered like the countryside through which it led, its white surface beneath the moonlit mist recalling that of a frozen river. Except for the open casements of deserted houses there was nothing to show that the barbarians had gone by, until, down a side-track to the left, the wanderers sighted a Roman villa in flames. No farm this, but a patrician's country mansion. The roof-tree had already fallen in; the coils of smoke that rose above where it had been were tinged red by the fires that still raged amid the walls; and to each of the eleven old men came the unspoken thought:

"It is as if I were looking upon the pillar of cloud and

the pillar of fire which went before the Tabernacle of the Lord when our forefathers followed the Ark of the Covenant, even as I and my companions now follow the Menorah."

Between Grandfather Abtalion and Rabbi Eliezer trotted the boy, panting in his eagerness not to be a drag on his elders. He was silent because the others said not a word, but his little heart fluttered against his ribs. He was afraid, now that the excitement of novelty was passing, mortally afraid because he could not guess why they had dragged him out of bed at such an hour, afraid because he did not know where the old men were taking him; most afraid of all because never before had he been in the open country after dark, and beneath the open sky. He was familiar with night in the alleys of the Jewish quarter; but there the blackness of the sky was a narrow strip in which two or three stars twinkled. No reason to dread that ribbon of sky, which familiarity had robbed of its terrors. He knew it best as he glimpsed it between the slats, which broke it up into tiny fragments, too small to be alarming, while he listened, before he fell asleep, to the prayers of the men, the coughing of the sick, the shuffling feet of those who went by in the alley, the caterwauling on the roof, the crackling of the logs as they burned on the hearth. On the right was Mother, on the left was Rachel; he felt safe, warm, and cosy; never alone.

But here the night was threatening, huge, and void. How tiny he seemed, so small a lad beneath the vast expanse of heaven. Had not the old men been with him to protect him, he would have burst into tears, would have tried to crawl into some hiding-place where he could escape from the huge dome which marched with him as he marched, always the same, always oppressive.

Happily there was room in his breast for pride as well

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as fear: pride because the elders in whose presence Mother dared not raise her voice, and before whom the children quaked—because these great and wise men had chosen him, little Benjamin, to accompany them upon their quest. What did it mean? What could it mean? Child though he was, he felt sure that something tremendous must account for this procession through the night. Most eager, therefore, was he to show himself worthy of their choice, trying to take manly strides with his puny legs, and refusing to admit even to himself that he was scared. But the test of his courage and endurance lasted too long. He grew more and more tired, frightened of the very shadows of himself and his companions; alarmed by the sound of their footsteps upon the paved road. Now, when a bat, blundering through the night, almost touched his forehead, he shuddered and screamed at the black, unknown horror. Gripping Abtalion's hand, he cried:

"Grandad, Grandad, where are we going?"

Without turning to look at the lad, his grandfather growled:

"Hold your tongue, and don't drag back. Little boys must be seen and not heard."

The youngster shrank as if from a blow, ashamed at having given vent to his terror. In thought he scolded himself. "Of course, I ought not to have asked." Still, he could not restrain his sobs.

But Rabbi Eliezer, the pure and clear, looked reproachfully at Abtalion over the little one's head, saying:

"Nay, friend, it is you who are to blame. How natural that the child should ask that question. What could he do but wonder at our taking him from his bed and bringing him forth with us into the night? Moreover, why should he not learn the object of our pilgrimage? We bring him with us because he is of our blood, and

therefore partaker in our destinies. Surely he will continue to sustain our sorrows long after we have been laid to rest? He is to live on, bearing witness to those of a coming time as the last member of our Roman community to see the Lampstand from the Table of the Lord. Why should you wish him to remain in ignorance? We have brought him with us to watch and to know, and to give tidings of this night in days to come."

Abtalion made no answer, feeling justly reproved. Rabbi Eliezer tenderly stroked Benjamin's hair, and said encouragingly:

"Ask, child, ask freely, and I will answer with the same freedom. Better to ask than to be ignorant. Only through asking can we gain knowledge, and only through knowledge can we win our way to righteousness."

The boy was elated that the sage whom all the community revered should talk to him as an equal. He would gladly have kissed the rabbi's hand, yet was too timid. His lips trembled, but he uttered no sound. Rabbi Eliezer—whose wisdom was not only the wisdom of books, since he had also the wisdom of those who know the human heart—understood, despite the darkness, all that Benjamin thought and felt. He sympathized with their little companion's impatience to know the whither and the why of this strange expedition, so he fondled the hand which lay as light and tremulous as a butterfly in his own withered palm.

"I will tell you where we are going, and will hide nothing. There is naught wrongful in our purpose, though it must be hidden from those whom ere long we shall join. God, who looks down on us from heaven, knows and approves. He knows the beginning as clearly as we know it ourselves; and he knows what we cannot know, the end."

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While speaking thus to the child, Rabbi Eliezer did not slacken his pace. The others quickened their steps for a moment to draw nearer and hearken to his words of wisdom.

"We walk along an ancient road, my child, on which our fathers and forefathers walked in days of yore. In ages past we were a nation of wanderers, as we have become once more, and as we are perhaps destined to remain until the end of time. Not like the other peoples have we lands of our own, where we can grow and harvest our crops. We move continually from place to place; and when we die our graves are dug in foreign soil. Yet scattered though we are, flung like weeds into the furrows from north to south and from east to west, we have remained one people, united as is no other, held together by our God and our faith in him. Invisible is the tie which binds us, the invisible God. I know, child, that this passeth your understanding, for at your tender age you can grasp only the life of the senses, which perceive nothing but the corporeal, that which can be seen, touched, or tasted, like earth and wood and stone and brass. For that very reason the Gentiles, being children in mind, have made unto themselves gods of wood and stone and metal. We alone, we of the Chosen People, have no such tangible and visible gods (which we call idols), but an invisible God whom we know with an understanding that is above the senses. All our afflictions have come from this urge which drives us into the suprasensual, which makes us perpetual seekers for the invisible. But stronger is he who relies upon the invisible rather than on the visible and the palpable, since the latter perisheth, whereas the former endureth for ever. Spirit is in the end stronger than force. Therefore, and therefore alone, little Benjamin, have we lived on through the ages, outlasting time because we are pledged to the timeless, and only because we have been

loyal to the invisible God has the invisible God kept faith with us.

"Child, these words of mine will be too deep for you. Often and often we elders are troubled because the God and the Justice in whom we believe are not visible in this our world. Still, even though you cannot now understand me, be not therefore troubled, but go on listening."

"I listen, Rabbi," murmured the boy, bashful but ecstatic.

"Filled with this faith in the invisible our fathers and forefathers moved on through the world. To convince themselves of their own belief in this invisible God who never disclosed himself to their eyes, and of whom no image may be graven, our ancestors made them a sign. For narrow is our understanding; the infinite is beyond our comprehension. Only from time to time does a shadow of the divine cast itself into our life here below. Fitfully and feebly a light from God's invisible countenance illumines our darkness. Hence, that we may be ever reminded of our duty to serve the invisible which is justice and eternity and grace, we made the furniture of the Tabernacle—where God was unceasingly worshipped—made a Lampstand, called the Menorah, whose seven lamps burned unceasingly; and an altar whereon the shewbread was perpetually renewed. Misunderstand me not. These were not representations of the divine essence, such as the heathen impiously fashion. The holy emblems testified to our eternally watchful faith; and whithersoever we wandered through the world the furnishings of the Holy Place wandered with us. Enclosed in the Ark of the Covenant, they were safeguarded in a Tabernacle, which our forefathers, homeless as we are this night, bore with them on their shoulders. When the Tabernacle with its Sacred Furniture rested, we likewise rested; when it was moved on-

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ward, we followed. Resting or journeying, by day or by night, for thousands of years we Jews thronged round this Holy of Holies; and as long as we preserve our sense of its sanctity, so long, even though dispersed among the heathen, shall we remain a united people.

"Now listen. Among the furnishings of the Holy Place were the Altar of the Shewbread, which also bore the fruits of the earth in due season; the Vessels from which clouds of incense rose to heaven; and the Tables of Stone whereon God had written his Commandments. But the most conspicuous of all the furniture was a Lampstand whose lamps burned unceasingly to throw light on the Altar in the Holy of Holies. For God loves the light which he kindled; and we made this Lampstand in gratitude for the light which he bestowed on us to gladden our eyes. Of pure gold, of beaten work, was the Lampstand cunningly fashioned. Seven-Branched was it, having a central stem and three branches on each side, every one with a bowl made like unto an almond with a knop and a flower, all beaten work of pure gold. When the seven lamps were lighted, each light rose above its golden flower, and our hearts rejoiced to see. When it burned before us on the Sabbath our souls became temples of devotion. No other symbol on earth, therefore, is so dear to us as this Seven-Branched Lampstand, and wherever you find a Jew who continues to cherish his faith in the Holy One of Israel, no matter under which of the winds of heaven his house stands, you will find in that house a model of the Menorah lifting its seven branches in prayer."

"Why seven?" the boy ventured to ask.

"Ask, and you shall be answered, child. To ask reverently is the beginning of wisdom. Seven is the most holy of numbers, for there were Seven Days of Creation, the crowning wonder being the creation of man in God's own image. What miracle can be greater than that we

should find ourselves in this world, be aware of it and love it, and know something of its Creator? By making light in the firmament of heaven, God enabled our eyes to see and our spirit to know. That is why, with its seven branches, the Lampstand praises both lights, the outer and the inner. For God has given us also an inner light in Holy Writ; and just as we see outwardly with our eyes so does Scripture enable us to see inwardly by the light of the understanding. What flame is to the senses, that is Scripture to the soul; for in Scripture all is recounted, explained, and enjoined: God's doings, and the deeds of our fathers; what is allowed to us and what forbidden; the creative spirit and the regulative law. In a twofold way God, through his light, enables us to contemplate the world: from without by the senses, and from within by the spirit; and thanks to the divine illumination we can even achieve self-knowledge. Do you understand me, child?"

"No," gasped the little boy, too proud to feign.

"Of course not," said Rabbi Eliezer gently. "These things are too deep for a mind so young. Understanding will come with the years. For this present, bear in mind what you can understand of all I have told you. The most sacred things of those we had as emblems on our wanderings, the only things remaining to us from our early days, were the Five Books of Moses and the Seven-Branched Lampstand, the Torah and the Menorah. Bear those words in mind."

"The Torah and the Menorah," repeated Benjamin solemnly, clenching his fists as if to aid his memory.

"Now listen further. There came a time, long ago, when we grew weary of wandering. Man craves for the earth, even as the earth craves for Man. After forty years in the wilderness we entered the Promised Land, as Moses foretold, and we took possession of it. We ploughed and sowed and harvested, planted vineyards

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and tamed beasts, tilled fruitful fields which we surrounded with hedges and hurdles, being glad at heart that we no longer sojourned among strangers to be unto them a scorn and a hissing. 'We believed that our wanderings were finished for ever and a day, being foolhardy enough to declare that the land was our very own—whereas to no man is land given, but only lent for a season. Always are mortals prone to forget that having is not holding, and finding is not keeping. He who feels the ground firm beneath his feet builds him a house, fancying that thus he roots himself as firmly as do the trees. Therefore we builded houses and cities; and since each of us had a home of his own, it was meet that we should wish our Lord and Protector likewise to have an abiding-place among us, a House of God which should be greater and more splendid than any human habitation. Thus it came to pass during the years when we were settled at peace in the Land of Promise, that there ruled over us a king who was wealthy and wise, known as Solomon——"

"Praised be his name," interposed Abtalion gently.

"Praised be his name," echoed the others, without slackening in their stride.

"——who builded a house upon Mount Moriah, where aforetime Jacob, dreaming, saw a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. Wherefore on awaking Jacob said: "Holy is this place, and holy shall it be to all the peoples of the earth." And here Solomon builded the Temple of the Lord, of stone and cedar wood and finely wrought brass. When our forefathers looked upon its walls they felt assured that God would dwell perpetually in our midst, and give us peace to the end of time. Even as we rested in our homes so did the Tabernacle rest in the House of God, and within the Tabernacle the Ark of the Covenant

which we had borne with us for so long. By day and by night burned unceasingly before the Altar the seven flames of the Menorah, for this and all that was sacred to us were enshrined in the Holy of Holies; and God himself, though invisible as he shall be while time endures, rested peacefully in the land of our forefathers, in the Temple of Jerusalem."

"May my eyes behold it once again," came the voices as in a litany.

"But listen further, my child. Whatever man possesses is entrusted to him only as a loan, and his happiness is unstable as a shadow. Not for ever, as we fancied, was our peace established, for a fierce people came from the east and forced a way into our town, even as the robbers whom you have seen forced a way into the city of the Gentiles among whom we have sojourned. What they could seize, they seized; what was portable, they carried away; what they could destroy, they destroyed. But our invisible goods they could not take from us—God's word and God's eternal presence. The Menorah, however, the holy Lampstand, they took from the Table of the Lord and carried it away; not because it was holy (since these sons of Belial knew naught of holiness), but because it was made of gold, and robbers love gold. Likewise they took the Altar and the Vessels, and drove our whole people into captivity in Babylon——"

"Babylon? What is Babylon? Where is Babylon?"

"Ask freely, child, and with God's will you shall be answered. Babylon was a great city, as big as Rome, lying nearly as far to the east of Jerusalem as Rome lies to the west. Look you, we have walked for three hours since leaving the gate of Rome and already we ache with weariness, but that march was a hundred times as long. Think, then, how far to the east the Menorah was taken by the robbers, and we driven with it into captivity. Mark this, also, that to God distance is nothing. To

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Man it is otherwise; but, perhaps the meaning of our unending pilgrimage is that what is sacred to us grows more sacred with distance, and our hearts are humbled by affliction. However that may be, when God saw that his word was still holy to us in exile, that we stood the test, he softened the heart of one of the kings of that alien people. Aware that we had been wronged, he let our forefathers return to the Promised Land, giving back to them the Lampstand and the furniture of the Tabernacle. Then did our forefathers leave Chaldea and make their way home to Jerusalem across deserts, mountains, and thickets. From the ends of the earth they returned to the place which they had never ceased to cherish in their memories. We rebuilt the Temple on Mount Moriah; again the seven lamps of the Seven-Branched Lampstand flamed before God's Altar, and our hearts flamed with exultation. Now mark this, Benjamin, that you may grasp the meaning of our pilgrimage which begins to-night. No other thing made by the hands of men is so holy, so ancient, and so travelled hither and thither, as this Menorah, which is the most precious pledge of the unity and purity of the Chosen People. Always when our lot is saddened the lamps of the Menorah are extinguished."

Rabbi Eliezer paused. At this the boy looked up, his eyes sparkling like the flames of the sacred emblem, eager with expectation that the story should be continued. The Rabbi smiled as he noticed this impatience, and stroked the lad's hair, saying:

"Have no fear, little one. The tale is not ended. Our destiny marches on. I could talk to you for years and fail to recount a thousandth part of all that has happened to us and all that awaits us. Listen, then, since you are a good listener, to what befell after our return to Jerusalem from Babylon. Once more we thought that the Temple had been established for ever. But once more

enemies came, across the sea this time, from the land where we now sojourn as strangers. A famous general led them, son of an emperor, and himself in due time to be emperor, Titus was he called——”

“Accursed be his name,” intoned the elders.

“——who breached our walls and destroyed the Temple. Impiously he entered the Holy of Holies and snatched the Lampstand from the Altar. He plundered the Lord’s House and had the sacred furnishings carried before him when he celebrated his triumph upon his return to Rome. The foolish populace rejoiced, thinking that Titus had conquered our God and that this was one of the captives who marched before him in fetters. So proud of his victory was the miscreant that he had an arch built to commemorate it, with graven images that showed forth how he had ravaged the House of God.”

“Rabbi,” asked the boy, “tell me, is that the Arch decorated with so many stone images? The Arch in the great square, the Arch which Father said I must never, never go through?”

“That’s the one, child. Never go through it, but pass by without looking, for this memorial of Titus’s triumph is likewise the memorial of one of the most sorrowful days in our history. No Jew may walk beneath the Arch of Titus, on which are graven images to show how the Romans mocked what was and always will be holy to us. Remember unfailingly——”

The old man broke off, for Hyrcanus ben Hillel had sprung forward from the rear to lay a hand upon his lips. The others were terrified by this irreverent freedom, but Hyrcanus silently pointed forward. Yes, there was something partially disclosed by the fog-bedimmed moon—a dark shape that seemed to wriggle along the white road like a huge caterpillar. Now, when the elders halted and listened, they could hear the creaking of

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heavily laden carts. Above these or beside them there flashed spears which looked like blades of grass that shine in the dew of morning—the lances of the Numidian rearguard escorting the spoil.

They kept good watch, the lancers, for a number of them wheeled their horses, to gallop back with levelled weapons and uttering shrill cries. Their burnouses streamed in the breeze, so that it seemed as if their chargers were winged. Involuntarily the eleven old men drew together in a bunch, the child in their midst. The lancers did not tarry until the steel points were close to the suspect pursuers; then they drew rein so suddenly that their mounts reared. Even in the faint light the cavalymen could see that these were no warriors, designing to recapture the booty, but peaceful white-beards, infirm and old, each with staff and scrip. Thus in Numidia, too, did pious elders make pilgrimage from shrine to shrine. The fierce lancers, suspicions allayed, laughed encouragingly, showing white teeth. The leader whistled, once more the troop wheeled and thundered down the road after the carts they were convoying, while the old men stood and trembled, hardly able to believe they were to be left unharmed.

Rabbi Eliezer, the pure and clear, was the first to regain composure. Gently, he tapped the little boy's cheek.

"You're a brave lad, Benjamin," he said, leaning forward over the youngster. "I was holding your hand, and it did not shake. Shall I go on with my story? You have not yet heard whither we are going, or why we did not seek our beds as usual."

"Please go on, Rabbi," answered the child, eagerly.

"I told you, you will remember, how Titus (accursed be his name) having laid impious hands on our holy treasures, carried them off to Rome, and, in the vanity

of his triumph, made a display of them all over the city. Thereafter, however, the emperors of Rome put the Menorah and the other sacred objects from Solomon's Temple for safe-keeping in what they called the Temple of Peace—a foolish name, for when has peace ever lasted in our contentious world? Nor would Jehovah permit the furniture of the Tabernacle which had adorned his own Holy House in Zion to remain in a heathen temple, so one night he sent a fire to consume that building with all its contents, save only our Lampstand and other treasures which were rescued from the devouring flames, to show once again that neither fire nor distance nor the hand of a robber has power over the Menorah. This was a sign, a warning from God, that the Romans should restore the sacred emblems to their own sacred place, where they would be honoured, not because they were made of gold, but because they were holy. When did such fools understand a sign, or when did men's stubborn hearts bow before the light of reason?"

Having paused to sigh, Rabbi Eliezer resumed :

"Thus the Gentiles took the Lampstand and put it away in one of the Emperor's other houses; and because it remained there in safe keeping for years and for decades they believed it to be theirs for all eternity. Nevertheless it is untrue to say that there is honour among thieves. What one robber has stolen will be taken from him forcibly by another. Just as Rome sacked Jerusalem, so has Carthage sacked Rome. Even as the Romans plundered us, they themselves have been plundered, and as they defiled our sacred places, so have their sacred places been defiled. But the robbers have also taken away what was ours, the Menorah, the emblem which used to stand on God's Altar in King Solomon's House. Those wains which drive westward through the darkness are carrying to the coast that which is dearest to us in the world. To-morrow the barbarians will put

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the Lampstand on one of their ships, to sail away with it into foreign parts, where it will be beyond the reach of our yearning eyes. Never again will the Lampstand shed its beams upon us who are old and near to death. Nevertheless, as those who have loved anyone when alive escort the body upon its last journey to the tomb, thus testifying their affection, so to-day do we escort the Menorah upon the first stage of its journey into foreign parts. What we are losing is the holiest of our treasures. Do you understand, now, little one, the meaning of our mournful pilgrimage?"

The child walked on with hanging head and made no answer. He seemed to be thinking things over.

"Never forget this, Benjamin. We have brought you with us as witness, that in days to come, when we lie beneath the sod, you may bear testimony to the way in which we were loyal to the sacred emblem, and may teach others to remain faithful. You will fortify them in the faith which sustains us, the faith that the Menorah will one day return from its wanderings in the darkness, and, as of old, will with its seven flames shed a glorious light upon the Table of the Lord. We awoke you from your slumbers that your heart might also awaken, and that you may be able to tell those of a later generation what befell this night. Store up everything in your mind that you may console others by telling them how your own eyes have seen the Menorah which has moved onward for thousands of years among strangers, even as our people have wandered. Firmly do I believe that it will never perish so long as we remain alive as God's Chosen People faithful to the Law."

Still Benjamin answered not a word. Rabbi Eliezer, the pure and clear, sensed the resistance which must underly this stubborn silence. He leaned forward, therefore, over the boy, and asked, gently, as was his manner: "Have you understood me?"

The child was froward. "No," he said curtly. "I don't understand, Rabbi. For if . . . if the Menorah is so dear to us and so holy . . . why do we let them take it away from us?"

A sigh escaped the old man as he said: "There is reason in your question, my boy. Why do we let them take it away from us? Why don't we resist? When you are older you will learn that in this world, alas, might is right, and that the righteous man can seldom prevail. Men of violence establish their will upon earth, which is a place where piety and righteousness have little power. God has taught us to suffer injustice, not trying to establish the right with the strong hand."

Rabbi Eliezer spoke these words as he marched forward with bowed head. Thereupon Benjamin snatched away his hand and stopped short. Bluntly, almost masterfully, did the boy, in his excitement, apostrophize Eliezer:

"But God? Why does he permit this robbery? Why does not he help us? You told me that he is a just God and almighty. Why does he favour the robbers instead of the righteous?"

Except for Eliezer the old men were outraged. They stopped in their stride, feeling as if their hearts had ceased to beat. Like the blast of a trumpet the boy's defiance had been hurled into the night, like a declaration of war against God. Ashamed of his grandson, Abtalion shouted:

"Silence! Blaspheme not!"

But the Rabbi cut him short:

"Be you silent, rather. Why should you find fault with an innocent child? His unsophisticated heart has but blurted out a question which, in truth, we ask ourselves daily and hourly, you and I and the rest of us: a question which the wisest of our people have asked since

the beginning of time. From of old the Jewish sages and prophets have inquired why Jehovah should deal so harshly with us among the nations, seeing that we serve him more fervently than any others. Why should he thrust us beneath the feet of our enemies that they may trample us into the dust, we who were the first to know God and to praise him in his unfathomable ways? Why does he destroy what we build; why does he frustrate our dearest hopes? Why does he drive us forth into exile whenever we think we have found rest; why does he excite the heathen to rage against us ever more furiously? Why does he visit us with supreme affliction, we whom he made his Chosen People, we whom he first initiated into his mysteries? Far be it from me to deceive this simple child. If his question be blasphemous, then I myself am a blasphemer every day of my life. Look you, I acknowledge it to you all. I also am froward. I also continually arraign God. Day after day do I, now eighty years of age, ask the question which has just been asked by a seven-year-old boy. Why should God visit upon us more than upon others such unceasing tribulations? Why does he allow us to be despoiled, helping those who plunder us to gain their ends? Often and often do I beat my breast in shame, but never can I stifle these urgent questionings. I should not be a Jew, I should not be a human being, if these meditations did not torment me day after day, these blasphemies as you call them which will continue to trouble me for as long as I draw breath."

The rest of the elders were astounded, nay, horrified. Never had any of them seen Kab ve Nake, the pure and clear, so greatly moved. This arraignment must have surged up from depths which were ordinarily concealed. They could scarcely recognize him as he stood there quaking with emotion and distress, and shamefacedly turning his face away from the child, who looked up at

him with wonder. Speedily, however, Rabbi Eliezer mastered his emotion, and, bending once more over the boy, he said appeasingly :

"Forgive me for speaking to these others, and to one who stands over us all, instead of answering your question. In the simplicity of your heart, little one, you ask me why God should permit this crime against us and against himself. In my own simplicity I answered you as frankly as I could : 'I do not know.' We do not know God's plans ; we cannot read his thoughts ; and his ways are past finding out. But ever and again, when I arraign him in the madness of my suffering and in the extremity of our general distress, I try to console myself with the assurance that perhaps, after all, there is some meaning in the afflictions with which he visits us, and that maybe each of us is atoning for a wrong. No man can say who hath committed it. Perhaps Solomon the Wise was unwise when he builded the Temple at Jerusalem, as if God were a man coveting a habitation here on earth and among one of its peoples. It may have been sinful of Solomon to adorn the Holy House as he did, as though gold were more than piety and marble more than inward stability. May not we Jews have departed from God's will by desiring, like the other nations, to have house and home of our own, saying, 'This land is ours' and speaking of 'our Temple' and 'our God' even as a man saith 'my hand' and 'my hair.' Perhaps that was why he had the Temple destroyed, and tore us away from our homes, that we might cease to turn our affections towards things visible and tangible, and remain faithful in the spiritual field alone to him the unattainable and the invisible. Maybe this is our true path, that we shall be ever afoot, looking sorrowfully back and yearningly forward, perpetually craving for repose, and never able to find rest. For the only road of holiness is that pursued by those who do not know their destination, but con-

tinue to march on steadfastly, as we march onward this night through darkness and danger, not knowing our goal."

The boy listened attentively, but Rabbi Eliezer was drawing to a close:

"Ask no more questions, Benjamin, for your questions exceed my capacity to answer. Wait patiently. Some day, perhaps, God will answer you out of your own heart."

The old man was silent, and silent likewise were the other elders. They stood motionless in the middle of the road; the silence of the night enwrapped them, while they felt as if they were standing in that outer darkness which lies beyond the realm of time.

Then one of them trembled and raised his hand. Seized with anxiety, he signed to the others to listen. Yes, through the stillness came a murmur. It was as if someone had gently plucked the strings of a harp; a muffled tone, but gradually swelling like the wind blowing out of the obscurity that hid the sea. Quickly, quickly, it rose to a roar, for now the wind raged, tossing the branches of the trees, making the bushes rustle loudly, while the dust whirled up from the road. The very stars in the sky seemed to tremble. The old men, knowing that God often spoke out of the storm, wondered if they were about to hear his voice in answer. Each looked timidly on the ground. Unthinkingly they joined hands, clasping one another for joint support in face of the threatening terror, and each could feel the alarmed throbbing of another's pulses.

But nothing happened. The flurry-scurry of the brief whirlwind subsided as rapidly as it had arisen; the rustle in the bushes and the grass ceased. Nothing happened. No voice spake; no sound broke the renewed and intimidating stillness. When they ventured to raise their eyes from the ground they perceived that, in the east,

an opaline light was showing on the horizon. The flurry of wind had been nothing more than that which usually precedes the dawn. Nothing more? We take it lightly, but is it not a daily miracle that day should tread upon the heels of night? As they stood there, still disquieted, the crimson in the eastern sky strengthened and spread, while the surrounding objects began to detach themselves from the gloom. Yes, the night was finished, the night of their pilgrimage.

"Dawn cometh," murmured Abtalion. "Let us pray."

The eleven old men drew together. Benjamin stood apart, being too young to share in this ritual, though he looked on with interest and excitement. The elders withdrew the praying shawls from their scrips to wrap them round their head and shoulders. Their phylacteries, too, they strapped on, round the forehead and the left hand and wrist which lie nearest the heart. Then they turned eastward, towards Jerusalem, and prayed, expressing thanks to God who created the world and enumerating the eighteen attributes of his perfection. Intoning and murmuring, they swayed their bodies forward and backward in time with the words. The boy found many of these words too difficult to understand, but he saw the ardour with which the worshippers waved their bodies in the exaltation of the prayer as, shortly before, the grass had waved in God's wind. After the solemn "Amen," they made obeisance one and all. Then, having taken off the praying shawls and the phylacteries, they put them back in their scrips and made ready to resume their march. They looked older now, these old men, in the pitiless light of day; the furrows on their faces seemed deeper, the shadows beneath their eyes and at the corners of their mouths were darker. As if newly arisen from their own deathbeds, accompanied by the child who, though tired, was fresh and vigorous in com-

parison, they wearily proceeded upon the last stage of their journey.

Bright and limpid was the Italian morning when the eleven old men and the little boy reached the harbour of Portus, where the yellow waters of the Tiber mingled sluggishly with the sea. Only a few of the Vandals' ships were still in the roads, and one after another was on its way to the offing, pennants flying gaily at the mastheads and holds full of loot. At length only one remained at anchor close to the shore, greedily swallowing the contents of the overloaded wagons, the remnants of the plunder from Rome. One cart after another drove on to the jetty, and slaves took load after load across the gangplank, carrying the burden on head or shoulders. Swiftly they bore chests packed with gold and amphorae filled to the neck with wine or oil. But hasten as they might, they were not quick enough for the impatient captain, who signed to the overseer to speed the embarkation with the lash. Now the last of the wains was being unloaded—the one which the pilgrims had been following throughout the night because it contained the Menorah. To begin with, its contents had been hidden by straw and sacking, but the old men shook with excitement as these wrappings were removed. Now had come the decisive moment, now or never must God work a miracle.

Benjamin's eyes were elsewhere. This was the first time he had seen the sea, which filled him with amazement. Like an enormous blue mirror it looked, arching to the sharp line of the horizon where sea merged into sky. Even larger it appeared to him than the dome of night with which he had so recently made acquaintance, the starry expanse of heaven. Spellbound, he watched the play of the waves on the shore, chasing one another up the beach, breaking into foam, receding and con-

tinually re-forming. How lovely was this sportive movement, such as he had never dreamed of in the dull, dark alley where he had been brought up! He threw a chest, tiny though this chest was, vigorously breathing in the air which had a tang he had never before experienced, determined to make the fresh sea-breeze invigorate his timid Jewish blood and fill it with a new joy. He longed to go close to the edge of the troubled waters, to stretch out his slender arms and embrace the wide and wonderful prospect. As he looked at the beautiful blue waters sparkling in the early sunshine he was thrilled by a new sense of happiness. How splendid and free and untroubled was everything here! The wheeling gulls reminded him of the white-winged angels of whom he had been told; gloriously white, too, were the sails of the ships, sails bellied by the wind. Then, when he closed his eyes for a moment and tilted his head back, opening his mouth wide to inhale more of the salt-tasting air, there suddenly occurred to him the first words of Scripture he had been taught: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Never before had the name of God, mentioned so often by Rabbi Eliezer during the night walk, been full, as now, of meaning and form.

Then a loud cry startled him. The eleven elders screamed as with one voice, and instantly he ran to join them. The sackcloth had just been removed to uncover the contents of the last wagon, and as the Berber slaves bent to lift a silver image of Juno, a statue weighing several hundredweights, one of them who was standing in the cart kicked the Menorah out of his way. The Seven-Branded Lampstand fell from the wagon on to the ground. That was why the old men had uttered their cry of terror and wrath, to see the sacred emblem—on which Moses' eyes had rested, which had been blessed by Aaron, which had stood upon the Altar of

the Lord in the House of Solomon—desecrated by falling into the dung from the team of oxen, defiled by dirt and dust. The slaves looked round inquisitively, wondering why the onlookers had screamed so dolorously. They could not understand why the foolish greybeards had yelled with horror, seizing one another by the arms to make a living chain of distress. No one had done them any harm. But the overseer, who would not suffer any pause in the work, lashed the toilers' naked backs with his whip, so once more subserviently they buried their arms in the straw of the load, this time to disengage a sculptured slab of porphyry, followed by another huge statue which, sustaining it by a pole and a rope round the head and the feet, they bore across the gangplank as they might have carried a slaughtered enemy. Speedily they emptied the wagon. Only the Lampstand, eternal symbol, still lay disregarded where it had fallen, half hidden by one of the wheels. The old men, still clasping one another's hands, were united also in the hope that the robbers, whom the overseer continued to speed at their task, would in their haste overlook the Menorah. Might it not be God's will, at the last moment, to save this precious thing for his devoted worshippers?

But now one of the slaves caught sight of it, stooped and lifted it on to his shoulders. Brightly it gleamed in the sunshine, so that the brightness of the morning grew yet more bright. This was the first time in their long lives that any of the elders save Hyrcanus ben Hillel had set eyes upon the lost treasure; and how lamentable that it should only be at a moment when the beloved object was again passing into the hands of the Gentiles, about to voyage into a foreign, a far-away land! The Berber slave was a big, strong, broad-shouldered man, but the golden Menorah was heavy, and he needed both hands to steady his burden as he walked across the swaying

plank. Five steps, four steps, and it would vanish for ever from their eyes. As if drawn by a mysterious force, the eleven elders, still clasped together, moved forward to the gangplank, their eyes blinded with tears, mumbling incoherently as spittle dribbled from their mouths. Drunken with sorrow they stumbled forward, hoping to be allowed to implant at least a pious kiss upon the holy emblem. One only among them, Rabbi Eliezer, though suffering no less than his brethren, remained clear-headed. He gripped Benjamin's hand so firmly that the boy found it hard to repress a cry of pain.

"Look, look well. You will be the last Jew alive to set eyes upon what was our most precious possession. You will bear witness how they took it away from us, how they stole it."

The child could hardly understand what the Rabbi meant; but sympathy with the old man's manifest agony surged up within him, and he felt that an unrighteous deed was being done. Anger, the uncontrollable fury of a child, boiled over. Without realizing what he was about, this seven-year-old lad snatched his hand away from Eliezer's and rushed after the Berber, who was at this moment crossing the gangplank, and who, strong though he was, tottered beneath the weight. This alien, this Gentile, should not take away the Lampstand. Benjamin flung himself upon the mighty porter, trying to snatch away his burden.

The slave, heavily laden, was staggered by the unexpected shock. It was only a little child who hung upon his arm, but, losing his balance upon the narrow plank, he fell beneath his burden, both of them on to the quay side. The child fell with him. Furiously the Berber struck with all his strength at Benjamin's right arm. Feeling the pain, which was intense, Benjamin yelled at the top of his voice, but his cry was drowned in the general hubbub. All who saw what had happened were

shouting and bawling: the Jewish elders, horror-stricken at the sight of the Menorah being once more rolled in the mud, and the Vandals on the ship growling with wrath. The enraged overseer rushed up to flog the Jewish elders away with his whip. Meanwhile the slave, greatly incensed, had risen to his feet. Delivering a hearty kick (fortunately he was unshod) at the groaning child, he shouldered his burden once more and hastily but triumphantly bore it along the gangplank into the ship.

The elders paid no heed to the youngster. Not one of them noticed the writhing little body on the ground, since they had eyes only for the Menorah as it was carried on board, its seven lamps pointing upward as if in appeal to heaven. Shudderingly they watched how, as soon as the Berber had crossed the plank, other hands carelessly relieved him of his burden and threw it upon a pile of the general spoils. The boatswain sounded his whistle, the moorings were cast off, and from between decks, where the galley-slaves were chained to their benches, at the word of command forty oars took the water, one-two, one-two. Instantly the galley responded, and moved away from the quay. Foam curled on either side of the prow; noiselessly it departed, except for the plashing of the oars; as it crossed the bar it began to pitch and toss upon the waves as if it were breathing and alive; pursuing the fleet, the other galleys and the sailing ships, it steered southward towards Carthage.

The eleven old men stared after the vanishing galley. Again they clasped hands, again they trembled, a living chain of horror and distress. Without holding council together, without mutually confiding their secret thoughts, they had all hoped for a miracle. But the galley had hoisted sail, was running before a favourable wind, and as she grew smaller and smaller so did their

expectancy of a miracle decline, to be submerged at last in the huge ocean of despair. Now the vessel on which their gaze was fixed seemed no larger than a seagull, until at length, their eyes wet with tears, they could discern no further trace of her on the forsaken surface of the waters. They must abandon hope. Once again the Menorah had wandered off into the void, unresting as ever, lost to the Chosen People.

At length, ceasing to look southward in the direction of Carthage, they bethought them of Benjamin, who lay where he had been struck down, groaning with the pain of his broken arm. Having gently raised the bruised and bleeding form they laid him on a litter. They were ashamed at having left it to this little boy to make a bold attempt at recovering the Lampstand; and Abtalion had good reason to dread what the women of his household would say when he brought back his grandson thus crippled. But Rabbi Eliezer, the pure and clear, consoled them, saying:

"Do not bewail what has happened, nor pity the lad. He has come well out of it. Recall the words of Holy Writ, how, upon the threshing-floor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the Ark of God and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the Ark of God—for God does not wish that things which are most holy shall be lightly touched by human hands. But he spared this child, who has suffered no more than a broken arm instead of being smitten to death. Perhaps there is a blessing in this hurt, and a calling."

The Rabbi bent low over the weeping boy:

"Be not wroth because of your pain, but accept it thankfully. Indeed it is a boon and our common heritage. Only through suffering doth our people thrive, and naught but distress can give us creative energy. A great

thing hath happened to you, for you have touched a most holy emblem, without worse hurt than a broken arm when you might well have lost your life. Maybe you are set apart by this pain, and a sublime meaning is hidden in your destiny."

The boy looked up at Rabbi Eliezer, strengthened and full of faith. In his pride at having such words addressed to him by the sage he almost forgot the pain. Not another groan passed his lips through the long hours during which they carried him home.

For decades after the sack of Rome by the Vandals there was continual unrest in the Western Empire—more than usually happens in seven generations. There was a rapid succession of emperors; Avilius, Majoranus, Libius Severus, and Anthemius, each of them slaying or driving out his predecessor. Again the Teutons invaded Italy from the north and plundered Rome. Now came the brief day of the last emperors of the West, Licinius, Julius Nepos, and Romulus Augustulus. Another Teuton, Adoacer, king of the Heruli, took Rome, overthrew the Western Empire in 476, took the title of King of Italy, and reigned until he in turn was overthrown by Theodoric, King of the Goths. These Gothic invaders fancied that their kingdom, established by mighty warriors, would endure for ever; but it too passed in a generation while other barbarians continued to come down from the north, and in Byzantium the Eastern Empire, the only successor of Rome, stood firm. It seemed as if there were to be no peace in the thousand-year-old city beside the Tiber since the Menorah had been carried away through the Porta Portuensis.

The eleven old men who had followed the Menorah upon its journey from Rome to Portus had long since passed away in due course of nature; so, likewise, had their children and their children's children grown old;

but still there lived on Benjamin, Abtalion's grandson, who had witnessed the Vandal raid. The boy had become a stripling, the stripling had grown to manhood, and was now exceedingly old. Seven of his sons had died before him, and of his grandchildren one had been smitten to death when, during the reign of Theodoric, the mob burned the synagogue. Benjamin lived on, with a withered arm, the outcome of a badly set fracture. He lived on as a forest giant may survive the storms that lay low the trees on either side. He saw emperors reign and perish, kingdoms rise and fall; but death spared him, and his name was honoured, almost holy, among all the Jewish exiles. Benjamin Marnefesh did they call him, because of his withered arm, the name meaning "one whom God has sorely tried." He was venerated as the last survivor of those who had set eyes upon Moses' Lampstand, the Menorah from Solomon's Temple which, its lamps unlighted, was hidden in the Vandals' treasure house.

When Jewish merchants came to Rome from Leghorn and Genoa and Salerno, from Mainz and Treves, or from the Levant, they made it their first business to call on Benjamin Marnefesh, that they might see with their own eyes the man who had himself seen the holy emblem on which the eyes of Moses and of Solomon had rested. They made obeisance before him as one of the chosen of the Lord; with a thrill of terror they contemplated his withered arm; and with their own fingers they ventured to hold the fingers which had actually touched the Menorah. Though everyone knew the story (since in those days news spread by word of mouth as readily as it now spreads in print), they begged him to tell them his memories of that wonderful night. With unfailing patience old Benjamin would recount the expedition the twelve of them had made on the fateful occasion; and his flowing white beard seemed to glisten as he repeated

the words that had been spoken by the long-dead Rabbi Eliezer, the pure and clear.

"Nor need we of the Chosen People despair," he would conclude. "The wanderings of the sacred emblem are not yet finished. The Lampstand shall return to Jerusalem, shall not forever be separated from those who reverence it. Once again shall our nation come together around it."

When his visitors left him it was with gladdened hearts; and one and all they prayed that he might live many years yet, he, the consoler, the witness, the last of those who had seen the Menorah.

Thus Benjamin, the sorely tried, the child of that night hallowed by ancient memories, lived to be seventy, to be eighty, to be eighty-five, to be eighty-seven. His shoulders were bowed beneath the weight of his years, his vision was dimmed, and often he was tired out long before the day was done. Yet none of the Jews of the Roman community would believe that death could strike him down, seeing that his life bore witness to so great a happening. It was unthinkable that the eyes of him who had beheld the Lampstand of the Lord could be closed in death before they had seen the return of the Seven-Branded Menorah, and they cherished his survival as a token of God's favour. His presence must grace every festival, and he must join in every religious service. When he walked the streets of the Jewish quarter the oldest bowed before old Benjamin, everyone whom he passed blessed his footsteps, and wherever the faithful assembled in sorrow or rejoicing he must be seated in the first place.

Thus did the Jews of the Roman congregation do honour as usual to Benjamin Marnefesh when, as custom prescribed, they assembled at the cemetery on the saddest day of the year, the Black Fast, the ninth of Ab, the day

of the destruction of the Temple, the gloomy day on which their forefathers had been made homeless and had been dispersed among all the lands of the earth. They could not meet in the synagogue, which had recently been destroyed by the populace, and it therefore seemed meet to them that they should draw near to their dead on this day of supreme affliction—outside the city, at the place where their fathers were interred in alien soil, they would come together to bemoan their own severance from the Promised Land. They sat among the tombs, some of them on gravestones already broken. They knew themselves to be inheritors of their forefathers' grief, as they read the names and the praises of the deceased. Upon many of the tombstones emblems had been chiselled: crossed hands for one who had been a member of the priesthood; or the vessels of the Levites, or the lion of the tribe of Judah, or the star of David. One of the upright gravestones had a sculptured image of the Seven-Branched Lampstand, the Menorah, to show that the man buried beneath it had been a sage and a light among the people of Israel. Before this tombstone, with his eyes fixed on it, sat Benjamin Marnefesh amid his companions—all of them with torn raiment and ashes scattered upon their heads, all bent like weeping willows over the black waters of their sorrow.

It was late in the afternoon, and the sun was sinking behind the pines and the cypresses. Brightly coloured butterflies fluttered round the crouching Jews as they might have fluttered round decaying tree-stumps; dragon-flies with iridescent wings settled unheeded upon their drooping shoulders; and in the lush grass beetles crawled over their shoes. The brilliant foliage trembled in the breeze, but, glorious as was the evening, the mourners did not raise their eyes, and their hearts were full of grief. Again and again they deplored the sad fate of their people in its dispersal. They neither ate nor

drank; they did not look at the glories which surrounded them; they only continued to intone lamentations about the destruction of the Temple and the fall of Jerusalem. Though every word they uttered was familiar they continued their litany to intensify their pain and lacerate their hearts the more. Their only wish, on this day of affliction, the day of the Black Fast, was to intensify their sense of suffering, to become ever more keenly aware of the woes of the Chosen People in which their dead forefathers had participated. They recounted one to another all the tribulations which had befallen the Jews throughout the ages. Even as now in Rome, so everywhere where a Jewish community existed, there crouched on this day and at this hour Hebrews in torn raiment and with ashes on their heads. Among the tombs they lamented, from end to end of the civilized world, uttering the same plaints. Everywhere they reminded one another that the daughters of Zion were fallen and had become a mockery among the nations. They knew that these universal lamentations of the faithful remained their firmest tie.

As they sat and lamented they did not notice how the sunlight grew more and more golden, while the dark stems of the pines and the cypresses glowed red, as if illumined from within. They failed to realize that the ninth of Ab, the day of the great mourning, was drawing to its close, and that the hour of evening prayer had come. It was at this moment that the rusty iron hinges of the cemetery gates creaked loudly. The mourners heard it. They knew that someone had entered, but did not rise. The stranger, without a word, stood silent, aware that the hour of prayer had come. Then the leader of the community perceived the newcomer, and greeted him, saying:

"Receive our blessing. Peace be with you, O Jew."
"A blessing upon all here," answered the stranger.

The leader spoke again, asking: "Whence come you, and to what community do you belong?"

"The community to which I belong no longer exists. I fled hither from Carthage by ship. Great things have happened there. Justinian, Emperor of the East, sent from Byzantium an army to attack the Vandals. Belisarius, his general, took the city by storm. That nest of pirates has fallen. The king of the Vandals is a prisoner, and his realm has been destroyed. Belisarius has seized all that the robbers got together during the last hundred years and is taking it to Byzantium. The war is over."

The Jews received these tidings mutely and indifferently, without rising. What was Byzantium to them, and what was Carthage? Were Edom and Amalek ever at odds, the heathen always making war against one another, war without purpose. Sometimes one side conquered, sometimes the other; but never did righteousness prevail. What did such things matter to the Chosen People? What did they care for Carthage, for Rome, or for Byzantium? One town only concerned them—Jerusalem.

A single member of the Roman community, Benjamin Marnefesh, the sorely tried, raised his head with interest, to inquire:

"What has happened to the Lampstand?"

"No harm has come to it, but Belisarius has carried it away with other trophies. With the rest of his plunder he is taking it to Byzantium."

Now, in turn, each was alarmed. They grasped the meaning of Benjamin's question. Again the Menorah was on its wanderings, from foreign land to foreign land. The stranger's news was like an incendiary torch flung into the dark edifice of their mourning. They sprang to their feet, strode across the tombs, surrounded the man from Carthage, sobbing and weeping:

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"Woe! To Byzantium! . . . Again across the seas! . . . To another foreign country! . . . Once more they have carried it off in triumph as did Titus, the accursed. . . . Always to some other land of the Gentiles and never back to Jerusalem. . . . Woe, woe hath befallen us!"

It was as if a branding iron had been thrust into an old wound. The same unrest, the same fear seized them all. When the furnishings of the Holy of Holies wandered, they too would have to wander; to go anew among strangers; to seek a fresh home which would be no home. Thus had it happened ever since the Temple was destroyed. Again and again there had been a new phase of the Diaspora. The old pain and the new seized them in a wild medley. They wept, they sobbed, they lamented; and the little birds which had been sitting peacefully upon the tombstones flew away in alarm.

One only among the assembled Jews, Benjamin, the old, old man, remained seated upon a moss-grown tombstone, silent while the others shouted and wept. Unconsciously he clasped his hands. As if in a dream he sat there, smiling as he looked at the tombstone on which was graven the likeness of the Menorah. Upon his furrowed countenance, encircled with white locks, there appeared something of the expression he had had as a child of seven, long, long ago. The wrinkles seemed to vanish; the lips grew supple again, while the smile, one could have fancied, spread all over his body as if, bowed forward though he was, he was smiling from within.

At length one of the others grew aware of his expression and was ashamed of himself for having lost control. Pulling himself together he looked reverently at Benjamin and nudged his nearest neighbour, with a nod of direction. One after another they silenced their lamentations

and looked breathlessly at the old man, whose smile hung like a white cloud over the darkness of their pain. Soon they were all as quiet as the dead among whose graves they had forgathered.

The silence made Benjamin aware that they were staring at him. Laboriously, being very frail, he arose from the tombstone on which he was sitting. Suddenly he appeared to radiate power such as he had never before possessed as he stood there with his silvern locks flowing down across his forehead from beneath his small silk cap. Never had his fellow-believers felt so strongly as at this hour that Marnefesh, the sorely tried, was a man with a mission. Benjamin began to speak, and his words sounded like a prayer:

"At length I know why God has spared me till this hour. Again and again I have asked myself why I, having grown useless from age, continue to break bread; why death should pass me by, since I am a weary do-nothing of an old man to whom eternal silence would be welcome. I lost courage and trust as I watched the excess of affliction with which our people has been visited. Now I understand that there is still a task for me to perform. I saw the beginning and I am summoned to see the end."

The others listened attentively to these obscure words. After a pause, one of them, the leader of the community, asked in low tones:

"What do you propose to do?"

"I believe that God has vouchsafed me life and vision for so long that I may once again set eyes on the Menorah. I must betake myself to Byzantium. Perhaps that which as a child I was unable to achieve will be possible to me in extreme old age."

His hearers trembled with excitement and impatience. Incredible was the thought that a decrepit man of eighty-seven would be able to win back the Lampstand from

the mightiest emperor on earth; and yet there was fascination in the dream of this miracle. One of them ventured to ask:

"How could you endure so long a journey? A three weeks' voyage across tempestuous seas. I fear it would be too much for you."

"A man is always granted strength when he has a holy task to perform. When the eleven elders took me with them eighty years ago from Rome to Portus they did so doubtingly, being afraid that the walk would be beyond my strength; yet I kept pace with them to the end. It is needful, however, since I have a withered arm, that someone shall go with me as helper, a vigorous man and young, that he may bear witness to later generations even as I have borne witness to yours."

He glanced around the circle, letting his eyes rest on one of the young men after another, as if appraising them. Each trembled at this probationary glance, which seemed to pierce him to the soul. Everyone of them longed to be chosen, but none would thrust himself forward. They waited eagerly for the decision. But Benjamin hung his head and murmured:

"No, I will not choose. You must cast lots. God will disclose to me the right companion."

The men drew together, cut grasses from the burial mounds, breaking off one much shorter than the others. He who drew the short blade was to go. The lot fell upon Jehoiakim ben Gamaliel, a man of twenty, tall and powerful, a blacksmith by trade, but unpopular. He was not learned in the law and was of a passionate disposition. His hands were stained with blood. At Smyrna, in a brawl, he slew a Syrian, and fled to Rome lest the constables should lay hands on him. Ill-pleased, the others silently wondered why the choice had thus fallen upon a man who was savage and mutinous instead of upon one who was reverent and pious. But when

Jehoiakim drew the short blade of grass Benjamin barely glanced at him, and said:

"Make ready. We sail to-morrow evening."

The whole of the day which followed this ninth of Ab the Jews of the Roman community were busily at work. Not a man among them plied his ordinary trade. All contributed the money they could spare; those who were poor borrowed upon whatever valuables they owned; the women gave their gold and silver buckles and such jewels as they possessed. Without exception they were sure that Benjamin Marnefesh was destined to liberate the Menorah from its new captivity and persuade Emperor Justinian, like King Cyrus of old, to send the people of Israel and the furnishings of the Temple back to Jerusalem. They wrote letters to the communities of the East, in Smyrna, Crete, Salonica, Tarsus, Nicaea, and Trebizond, asking them to send emissaries to Byzantium and to collect funds on behalf of the holy deed of liberation. They exhorted the brethren in Byzantium and Galata to accept Benjamin Marnefesh, the sorely tried, as a man chosen by the Lord for a sublime mission and to smooth his path for him. The women got ready wraps and cloaks and cushions for the journey; and also food prepared as the law directs, that the lips of the pious need not be contaminated by unclean victuals on the voyage. Although the Jews in Rome were forbidden to drive in a cart or to ride on horseback they secretly provided a vehicle outside the gates that the old man might reach the harbour without the fatigue of a long walk.

To their surprise, however, Benjamin refused to enter this vehicle. Eighty years before he had gone on foot from Rome to Portus, completing the march betwixt midnight and morning. He would do the same now, said the determined octogenarian. A foolhardy under-

taking, thought his co-religionists to begin with, for a man almost decrepit to attempt so long a march. But they were amazed to see the way in which he stepped out, being as it were transfigured by his vocation. The tidings from Carthage had instilled new energy into his ageing limbs, and invigorated his senile blood. His voice, which for years had been the thin pipe of a very old man, was now deep-toned and masterful as, almost wrathfully, he refused to be coddled. They contemplated him with respectful admiration.

All through the night the Jewish men of Rome accompanied Benjamin Marnefesh upon the road which their ancestors had trod to accompany the Lampstand of the Lord. Privily, under cover of darkness, they brought with them a litter to carry the old man should his strength give out. But Benjamin led the way lustily. In silence he marched, his mind filled with memories of long ago. At each milestone, at each turn of the road, he recalled more and more clearly those far distant hours of his childhood. He remembered everything plainly, the voices of those who had generations ago been buried; and he recapitulated the words that were spoken on that momentous journey. There on the left had risen the pillar of fire from the burning house; this was the milestone opposite which his companions' hearts had failed them when the Numidian lancers were charging down upon them. He recalled each one of his questions, and each one of Rabbi Eliezer's answers. When he reached the place where, at dawn, the elders had prayed at the roadside, he donned his praying shawl and his phylacteries, and, turning to the East, intoned the very prayer which fathers and forefathers were accustomed to say morning after morning, the prayer which, handed down from generation to generation, children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren would continue to utter.

His companions wondered. Why should he speak the morning prayer at this hour? As yet there was no hint of daybreak in the sky. Why, then, should so pious a man utter the morning prayer at this untimely instant? Contrary to custom and tradition, it was a defiance of the prescriptions of the Law. Still, however strange a freak it seemed, they watched him reverently. What he, the chosen of the Almighty, did could not be wrong. If, when day had not yet dawned, he chose to thank God for the gift of light, he must have good reason for what he was doing.

Having said his prayer, old Benjamin refolded his praying shawl, put away his phylacteries, and marched on sturdily, as if his act of piety had refreshed him. When they reached Portus day had begun. He gazed long out to sea, thinking of himself as a child when he had glimpsed the sea for the first time, watching the play of the waves on the shore and gazing out towards the horizon. "The same sea as of old, deep and unfathomable as God's thoughts," he piously reflected. Rejoicing, as before, in the brightness of the sky, he gave his blessing to each of his companions, convinced that he was taking leave of them for ever; then, accompanied by Jehoiakim, he went on board the ship. Like their fathers and grandfathers eighty years before, the Jews now watched with interest and excitement as the ship hoisted her sails and made for the offing. They knew they had set eyes upon the sorely tried Benjamin for the last time, and when the sails vanished in the distance they became aware of a keen sense of loss.

Steadily the merchant vessel proceeded on her course. The waves rose high, and dark clouds gathered in the west. The seamen were exceedingly anxious about the weather. But, though once or twice they had baffling winds and rough weather which was most uneasy for landmen, they reached Byzantium safely three days

after the arrival of Belisarius' fleet with the spoils of Carthage.

After the fall of the Western Empire and the consequent decline of Rome, Byzantium became the sole mistress of the occidental civilized world. The streets of the capital were thronged with lively crowds, for it was years since there had been promise of so glorious a spectacle in a town which loved festivals and games far more than it loved God or righteousness. In the circus, Belisarius, conqueror of the Vandals, was to parade his victorious army and display his booty before the Basileus, the Master of the World. Enormous crowds packed the streets, which were gaily decorated with flags; the vast hippodrome was filled to bursting; and the fretful populace, tired of waiting, murmured in its impatience. The gorgeous imperial tribune, the cathisma, remained untenanted. When the Basileus arrived he would come through the underground passage which connected the dais with his palace; but he was long of coming, and the expectant sightseers grew querulous.

At length a blast of trumpets heralded the great man's approach. The first to appear were the members of the imperial guard, tall soldiers resplendent in red uniforms and with flashing swords; next there rustled in, clad in silken garments, the chief dignitaries of the court, with the priests and the eunuchs; last of all, borne in brightly coloured litters, each with a canopy, came Justinian, the Basileus, the autocrat, wearing a golden crown that looked like a saint's halo, and Empress Theodora, glittering with jewels. As the ruling pair entered the imperial box a roar of acclamation arose from all the tiers of the huge assembly. Forgotten now was the terrible fight which had broken out in the hippodrome only three years before between the Green and the Blue factions of the circus, when the Greens had proclaimed a rival

emperor and thirty thousand had been slain by the imperial forces under Belisarius. Popular memories are short, and the victorious cause is readily acclaimed as the just one. Intoxicated by the display, overwhelmed by the frenzy of their own enthusiasm, the countless spectators shouted and howled and applauded in a hundred tongues, while the stone circles of the hippodrome echoed to their voices. It was a whole city, a whole world, which now adulated its rulers: Justinian, the grandson of a Macedonian peasant; and Theodora, the lovely actress who, before her marriage, had danced totally nude in this same arena, and had sold her favours to any casual lover who could pay a sufficient fee. These escapades, these disgraces were forgotten, as every shame is wiped away by victory and every deed of violence is excused by a subsequent triumph.

But on the highest tiers, mute above the vociferating crowds, stood spectators of marble, hundreds upon hundreds of the statues of Hellas. From their peaceful temples they had been torn away, the images of the Gods; from Palmyra and Cos, from Corinth and Athens; from triumphal arches and from pedestals they had been snatched, white and shining in their glorious nudity. Unaffected by transient passions, immersed in the perpetual dream of their own beauty, they were dumb and unparticipating, motionless, utterly aloof from human turmoil. With eyes that were sculptured but unseeing they stared steadfastly across the agitated hippodrome toward the blue waters of the Bosphorus.

Now there came another flourish of trumpets, to announce that Belisarius' triumphal procession had reached the outer gates of the hippodrome. The portals were thrown open and once more the spectators shouted thunderous acclamations. Here they were, the iron cohorts of Belisarius, the men who, under their famous commander, had re-established imperial rule in Northern

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Africa, conquering all Justinian's enemies, freeing Byzantium from its anxieties, and ensuring for the pleasure-loving crowds an unchecked supply of bread and circuses. Even louder were the shouts of applause at the appearance of the booty, the spoils of Carthage, to which there seemed to be no end. Behold the triumphal cars which the Vandals had seized long, long ago; next, sustained by a framework of poles on men's shoulders, came a bejewelled throne; this was followed by the altars of unknown gods, and by lovely statues, the work of artists who had doubtless been famous in other times and other lands; then chests filled to the brim with gold chalices and vases of silken garments. The vast abundance of plunder which the Vandal pirates had collected from the ends of the earth had now been won by Belisarius for its rightful owner, Emperor Justinian. What could his loyal subjects do but shout themselves hoarse at the sight of so much wealth assembled from all lands for the enrichment of their own mighty ruler?

Amid such splendours the jubilant onlookers scarcely noticed the coming of a few articles which seemed insignificant when compared with what had gone before: a small table of which the wood had been covered by plates of hammered gold, two silver trumpets, and a seven-branched lampstand. No cheers greeted these seemingly trifling utensils. But on one of the topmost tiers was an old, old man who groaned as, with his left hand, he grasped Jehoiakim's arm. After four-score years Benjamin Marnefesh again set eyes upon what he had seen only once before, as a child of seven—the sacred Candelabrum from Solomon's House, the Menorah which his little hand had grasped for a moment, with the result that ever since he had had a withered arm. Happy and glorious sight: the holy emblem was unchanged, uninjured. Invincible did the eternal Lamp-

stand march through the eternity of days, and had now taken a long stride nearer home. The sense of God's grace in granting him another sight of the Menorah was overwhelming. Unable to contain himself, he shouted: "Ours, ours, ours for all eternity!"

But none marked his cry, not even those nearest to him. For at this moment the whole assembly was raging with excitement. Belisarius, the victorious general, had entered the arena. Far behind the triumphal cars, far behind the vast wealth of spoil, he marched in the simple uniform he had worn on active service. But the populace knew him in an instant, shouting his name so loudly, so exultantly, that Justinian was jealous, and pulled a wry face when the commander-in-chief made obeisance.

A silence ensued, tense with expectation, and no less striking than the previous uproar. Gelimer, the last King of the Vandals in Africa, mockingly clad in a purple robe, led in behind Belisarius the conqueror, now stood before the Emperor. Slaves tore off the purple garment, and the vanquished monarch prostrated himself. For a moment the myriads of onlookers held their breath, staring at the Basileus' hand. Would he grant grace or give the sign for immediate execution? Would he raise his finger or lower it? Look, Justinian lifted a forefinger, Gelimer's life was to be spared, and the crowd cheered approval. One only among the spectators disregarded this incident. Benjamin could think of nothing but the Menorah, which was slowly being carried round the arena. When, at length, the sacred emblem vanished through the exit, the old man's senses reeled.

"Lead me forth."

Jehoiakim grumbled. A young man, pleasure-loving, he wanted to see the rest of the show. But old Benjamin's bony hand gripped his arm impatiently.

"Lead me forth! Lead me forth!"

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As if struck blind, the aged and sorely tried Benjamin Marnefesh groped his way across the town, leaning on Jehoiakim's arm, with the Menorah in imagination ever before his eyes, as he impatiently urged his guide not to tarry, but to bring him quickly to the Jewish quarter of the town. Benjamin had grown anxious lest the feeble flame of his life should flicker out prematurely, before he was given time to fulfil his mission and rescue the Lampstand.

Meanwhile, in the synagogue at Pera the community had for hours been awaiting their exalted guest. Just as in Rome the Jews were only allowed to dwell on the farther side of the Tiber, so in Byzantium were they restricted to the farther side of the Golden Horn. Here, as everywhere, to be held aloof was their destiny; but in this aloofness there also lay the secret of their survival as a distinct people.

The small synagogue, overcrowded and stuffy, was packed not only with the Jews of Byzantium but with others of the congregation assembled from far and from near. From Nicæa and Trebizond, from Odessa and Smyrna, from various towns in Thrace, from every Jewish community within reach, envoys had arrived to take part in the proceedings. Long since had news come that Belisarius had stormed the Vandals' stronghold and was bringing back to Byzantium, with numerous other treasures, the Seven-Branched Lampstand. To all the coasts of the Mediterranean had the tidings spread, so that there was not a Jew in the Byzantine Empire who failed to be aware of it. Though scattered like chaff over the threshing-floors of the world, and many of them more at home in Gentile tongues than in their own Hebrew, all members of this dispersed people retained a common interest in their holy emblem, suffering on this account common sorrows and hoping for common

joys; and though they were sometimes at enmity with one another, or mutually forgetful, their hearts beat in unison when danger threatened. Again and again persecution and injustice reforged the chain out of which their unity had been fashioned, so that the strength of these bonds was perpetually renewed; and the more savage the bludgeonings of fate the more firmly were the Jews of the Diaspora re-cemented into the one Chosen People. Thus the rumour that the Menorah, the Lampstand of the Temple, the Light of the Jewish nation, had once more been liberated from duress and was wandering as of old from Babylon and from Rome across lands and seas, aroused every Jew as if the event were happening to his own self. In streets and houses they conversed eagerly about the matter, asking their rabbis and their sages to interpret Scripture and explain the significance of these wanderings. Why had the sacred emblem started on its travels once more? Were they to hope or were they to despair? Was there to be a fresh persecution, or were the old ones to come to an end? Would they be driven from their homes to roam no man knew whither, unresting as of old now that the Menorah was again on the move? Or did the deliverance of the Lampstand betoken their own deliverance likewise? Was the Diaspora at length to come to an end? Were they to regather in their ancient home, in the Land of Promise? Terrible was their impatience. Messengers hastened from place to place to learn what was happening to the Menorah, and intense was the disappointment of the Jews when finally they were informed that, as had happened half a thousand years before in Rome, so now was the Seven-Branched Candlestick to be borne in a triumph at Byzantium beneath the contemptuous eyes of a Gentile Emperor.

This intelligence moved them profoundly; but excitement rose to fever heat when the letter from the Roman

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community arrived informing them that Benjamin Marnefesh, the man sorely tried, the man who in early childhood had been the last to set eyes upon the Menorah when the Vandals sacked Rome, was on his way to Byzantium. To begin with, amazement was their predominant feeling. For years and for decades every Jew, however far from Rome, knew about the wonderful deed of the seven-year-old boy who, when the Vandals were carrying off the Lampstand, had tried to snatch it from the robbers, and had been struck down, with a broken arm. Mothers told their children about Benjamin Marnefesh, whom God's own hand had touched; and Jews learned in the Law told their pupils. This brave exploit of a little boy had become a pious legend like those in Holy Writ, like the tale of David's slaying of Goliath and many others. At eventide, in Jewish houses, the heroic deed was related over and over again by mothers and by the elders of the people, among the stories of Ruth and Samson and Haman and Esther.

Now had come the astounding, the almost incredible news that this legendary child still lived. Old though he was, Benjamin Marnefesh, the last witness, was on his way to Byzantium. This must be a sign from the Almighty. Not without reason could Jehovah have spared him far beyond the allotted span. Was it not likely that he had been preserved for a special mission, that he was to take the sacred emblem back to Jerusalem, and to lead his co-religionists thither as well? The more they talked the matter over among themselves the less were they inclined to doubt. Faith in the coming of a saviour, a redeemer, glowed eternal in the blood of this outcast people, ready to flame up at the first breath of hope. Now it burned intensely and warmed their hearts. In towns and villages the Gentiles among whom the Jews dwelt were mightily puzzled at the aspect of their

Hebrew neighbours, who had changed betwixt night and morning. Those who, as a rule, were timid and cringing, ever in expectation of a curse or a blow, were now cheerful and ready to dance for joy. Misers who counted every crumb were buying rich apparel; men who were usually slow to speak stood up in the market-place to preach and to prophesy; women heavy with child slipped away joyfully to gossip about the news with their neighbours; while the children waved flags and sported garlands. Those who were most powerfully impressed by the report began to make ready for the journey, selling their possessions to buy mules and carts that there should not be a moment's delay when the summons came to set out for Jerusalem. Surely they must travel when the Menorah was travelling; and was it not true that the herald who had once before accompanied the Lamp-stand for a space when it left Rome was again on the way? What signs and wonders such as this had there been among the Jews during the latter generations of the Dispersion?

Thus every congregation which received the news in time appointed an envoy to be on hand when the Menorah should reach Byzantium, and to take part in the deliberations of the Byzantine brethren. All who were thus chosen thrilled with happiness and blessed God's name. How wonderful it seemed to them in their petty and obscure lives of daily need and hourly peril that they, inconspicuous traders or common craftsmen, should be privileged to participate in such marvellous events and to set eyes upon the man whom the Almighty had spared to so great an age for the deed of deliverance! They bought or borrowed sumptuous raiment as if they had been invited to a great banquet; during the days before departure they fasted and bathed and prayed diligently that they might be clean of body and pure at heart when they started on their mission; and when they

left their homes the community turned out in force to accompany them on the first stage of the journey. Wherever there were Jewish confraternities along the road to Byzantium they were proud to entertain the envoys and pressed money upon them for the redemption of the Candelabrum. With all the pomp of a mighty monarch's ambassador did these men of little account, the representatives of a poor and powerless people, proceed on their way; and when they encountered one another, joining forces for the rest of the pilgrimage, they eagerly discussed what would happen, excitement growing as they spoke. Naturally, as this fervour grew each of them reacted on the other, and thus they became increasingly confident that they were about to witness a miracle and that the long-propheesied turn in the fortunes of their nation was to occur.

Behold them assembled, a motley crowd of ardent talkers holding lively converse in the synagogue at Pera. Now the boy whom they had sent to keep watch ran up, panting and waving a white cloth as he came, in token that Benjamin Marnefesh, the expected guest, had crossed from Byzantium in a boat. Those who were seated sprang to their feet; those who had been talking most volubly were struck dumb with excitement; and one of them, an exceedingly old man, fell in a faint, being struck down by emotion. None of the company, not even the leader of the community, ventured to go and meet the new arrival. Holding their breath, they stood to await his coming; and when Benjamin (led by Jehoia-kim) an imposing figure with his white beard and flashing eyes, drew near to the house, he seemed to them patriarchal, the true lord and master of miracles. Their repressed enthusiasm broke forth.

"Blessed be thy coming! Blessed be thy name!" they shouted to him. In a trice they surrounded him, kissing the hem of his garment while the tears ran down their

withered cheeks. They jostled one another to get near him, each of them piously wishing to touch the arm which had been broken in the attempt to rescue the Lord's Lampstand. The leader of the community had to intervene for the visitor's protection, lest, in the frenzy of their greeting, they should overturn him and trample him beneath their feet.

Benjamin was alarmed at the exuberance of their welcome. What did they want? What did they expect of him? Anxiety overcame him when he realized the intensity of their anticipations. Gently yet urgently he protested.

"Do not look for so much from me or entertain such exalted ideas which I myself do not harbour. I can work no miracles. Be content with patient hope. It is sinful to ask for a miracle as if its performance were a certainty."

They hung their heads, disconcerted that Benjamin had read their secret thoughts; and they were ashamed of their impetuosity. Discreetly they drew aside so that their leader could conduct Benjamin to the seat prepared for him, well stuffed with cushions and raised above the seats of the others. But once more Benjamin protested, saying:

"No, far be it from me to sit above any of you. Not for me to be exalted, who am, perhaps, the lowliest of your company. I am nothing more than a very old man to whom God has left little strength. I came merely to see what would happen to the Menorah and to take counsel with you. Do not expect me to work a miracle."

They complied with his wishes and he sat among them, the only patient member of an impatient assembly. The leader of the community rose to give him formal greeting:

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"Peace be unto you. Blessed be your coming and blessed your going. Our hearts are glad to see you."

The others maintained a solemn silence. In low tones the leader resumed:

"From our brethren in Rome we received letters heralding your arrival, and we have done everything in our power. We have collected money from house to house and from place to place to help in the redemption of the Menorah. We have prepared a gift in the hope of softening the Emperor's heart. We are ready to bestow on him the most precious of our possessions, a stone from Solomon's Temple which our forefathers saved when the Temple was destroyed, and this we propose to offer Justinian. At this moment his most cherished purpose is to build a House of God more splendid than there has ever been in the world before, and from all lands and all cities he is collecting the most splendid and most sacred materials to this end. These things we have done willingly and joyfully. But we were terrified when we heard that our Roman brethren wanted us to gain access for you to the Emperor, that you might beg him to restore the sacred Lampstand. We were mightily alarmed, for Justinian, who rules over this land, regards us with disfavour. He is intolerant of all those who differ from him in the smallest particle, whether they be Christians of another sect than his own or heathens or Jews; and perhaps it will not be long before he expels us from his empire. Never has he admitted any member of our community to audience; and it was, therefore, bowed with shame that I came to tell you how impossible it would be for us to fulfil the request of our brethren in Rome. No Jew will ever be admitted to the presence of Emperor Justinian."

The leader of the community, who had spoken timidly and deprecatingly, was silent. All were disconcerted.

How was the miracle to take place? What change in the situation could be effected if the Emperor were to close his ears to the words of God's messenger, were to harden his heart? But now, when the leader spoke once more, his voice was firmer and clearer:

"Yet magical and comforting is it to learn again and ever again that to God nothing is impossible. When, heavy of heart, I entered this house there came up to me a member of our community, Zechariah the goldsmith, a pious and just man, who informed me that the wish of our Roman brethren would be fulfilled. While we were aimlessly talking and striving he set quietly to work, and what had seemed impossible to the wisest among us he was able to achieve by secret means. Speak, Zechariah, and make known what you have done."

From one of the back rows there stood up hesitatingly a small, slender, hunchbacked man, shy because so many eyes were turned on him. He lowered his head to hide his blushes for, a lonely craftsman, used only to his own company, he was little accustomed to conversation. He cleared his throat several times, and, when he began to speak, his voice was as small as a child's.

"No occasion to praise me, Rabbi," he murmured, "not mine the merit. God made things easy for me. For thirty years the treasurer has been well disposed towards me; for thirty years I have been one of his journeymen; and when, three years ago, the mob rose against the Emperor and plundered the mansions of the nobles, I hid him and his wife and child in my house for several days until the danger was past. I felt sure, therefore, that he would do anything I asked him, all the more since I had never asked him anything before. But when I knew that Benjamin was on the way I ventured to put a request, and he went to tell Justinian that a great and private message was coming across the sea.

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By God's grace this moved the Emperor, who wants to see our messenger from Rome. To-morrow he will give audience to Benjamin and our leader in the imperial reception room."

Shyly and quietly Zechariah resumed his seat. There was an amazed and reverent silence. Assuredly this was the miracle for which they had been waiting. Never before had a Jew been received in audience by the unapproachable Emperor. They trembled, open-eyed, while the conviction that God's grace had been vouchsafed to them presided over their solemn silence. But Benjamin groaned like a sorely wounded man, saying:

"Oh God, oh God! What burdens art thou laying on me? My heart is feeble and I cannot speak a word of the Greek tongue. How can I present myself before the Emperor, and why should I do so more than another? I was sent here only to bear testimony, to look upon the Menorah, not to seize it or get possession of it. Do not choose me. Let another speak. I am too old, I am too weak."

His hearers were horrified. A miracle had been vouchsafed, and now he who had been chosen to perform it was unwilling. But, while they still wondered what they could do to overcome their visitor's timidity, Zechariah again rose slowly to his feet. When he now spoke it was in a firmer voice than before. The man had grown resolute.

"No, Benjamin, you must go to the audience, and you only. A little thing it was that I did, but I would not have ventured to do it for any other than you. This much I do know, that if any man can do so it is you who will bring the Menorah to its resting-place."

Benjamin stared at the speaker.

"How can you tell?"

Zechariah repeated firmly: "I know, and I have long

known. Only you, if anyone, can bring the Menorah to its resting-place."

Benjamin's heart was shaken by this definite assurance. He looked full at Zechariah, who was himself looking encouragingly at Benjamin, and smiling as he did so. Suddenly it seemed to Benjamin as if Zechariah's features were familiar, and in Zechariah's eyes there was also a light of recognition, for his smile broadened, and he spoke with reinforced confidence:

"Recall that night eighty years ago. Do you remember one of the old men of your company, Hyrcanus ben Hillel by name?"

Now it was Benjamin's turn to smile.

"How could I fail to remember him? I remember every word and every happening of that blessed night as if it had been yesterday."

Zechariah went on: "I am his great-grandson. Goldsmiths have we been for generations. When an emperor or a king has gold and gems, and has need of a cunning craftsman or an appraiser, he chooses one of our race. Hyrcanus ben Hillel, at Rome, kept watch over the Menorah in its imprisonment; and all of his family ever since, no matter in what place, have been awaiting the hour when the Lampstand might come into their charge in some other treasury, for where there are treasures there are we as valuers and jewellers. My father's father said to my father and my father reported it to me that, after the night on which your arm was broken, Rabbi Eliezer, the pure and clear, proclaimed of you what you yourself could not yet know, being but a little child, that there must be some great meaning in your deed and in your suffering. 'If anyone,' said the Rabbi, 'then this little boy will redeem the Menorah.'"

All trembled. Benjamin looked down. Greatly moved, he said:

"No one has ever been kinder to me than was Rabbi

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Eliezer that night, and his words are sacred to me. Forgive me my cowardice. Once, long ago, when a child, I was courageous; but time and old age have dashed my spirits. I must implore you not to expect a miracle from me. If you ask me to go to the man who now holds the Lampstand in his grip, I will do my best, for woe unto him who refrains from a pious undertaking. Truth to tell, I am not one of those who have the gift of eloquence, but perhaps God will put words into my mouth."

Benjamin's voice was low and diffident, so that it was plain he felt the burden of the task which had been imposed on him. Still more softly he said:

"Forgive me if I leave you now. I am an old man, wearied by the journey and by the excitement of this day. With your permission I will seek repose."

Respectfully they made way for him. One only of the company, the impetuous Jehoiakim, his companion, could not refrain from questioning old Benjamin on the way to the appointed quarters:

"What will you say to the Emperor to-morrow?"

The old man did not look up, but murmured as if to himself:.

"I do not know, nor do I want to know or to think about the matter. In myself there is no power. What I have to say must be given to me by the Almighty."

Long that night the Jews sat together in Pera. Not one of them could sleep, nor had any inclination to seek his couch, so they talked unceasingly, holding counsel. Never had they felt so near the realm of miracles. What if the Diaspora were really drawing to a close; if an end were about to come to the cruel distresses of life among the Gentiles, the everlasting persecutions, in which the Chosen People was trodden underfoot, afraid

day after day and night after night of what the next hour would bring forth? What if this old man who had sat among them in the flesh were in very truth the Messiah, one of those mighty of speech such as had lived aforetime among their people, able to touch the hearts of kings and move them to righteousness? What unthinkable happiness, what incredible grace, to be able to bring home the sacred emblem, to rebuild the Temple and to live within its shadow! Like men drunken with wine they talked the matter over throughout the long night, their confidence growing all the while. They had forgotten the old man's warning that they were not to expect a miracle from him. Had they not, as pious Jews, learned from Holy Writ to look always for God's miracles? How could they go on living, outcast and oppressed, unless in perpetual expectation of this redemption? Interminable seemed the night, and they could no longer restrain their expectations. Again and again they glanced at the hourglass, thinking that its orifice must have become clogged. Again and again one of them went to the window to look for the first glimmer of dawn upon the darkened sea, and for the flames of coming day which would be appropriate to the flames that were burning in their hearts.

It was difficult for the leader to control his usually docile brethren. One and all they wanted, on the coming day, to accompany Benjamin to Byzantium, where they would stand outside the palace, while he, within, conversed with the ruler of the world. They wished to be close to him while this miracle was being worked. The leader had sternly to remind them how dangerous it would be for them to assemble in front of the imperial palace, seeing that the populace was ever hostile to the Jews, upon whom suspicion would easily fall. Only by using threats could he induce them to stay in the synagogue at Pera where, unseen by their enemies, they could

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pray to the invisible God while Benjamin was received in audience by the great ruler. They prayed, therefore, and fasted throughout the day. So earnestly did they pray that it seemed as if all the home-sickness of all the Jews of the world must be concentrated within the heart of each one of them. Of nothing else could they think than of their hopes that this miracle would be performed, and that, by God's grace, the curse of having to live among the Gentiles would be removed for ever from the Chosen People.

Noon was the appointed hour, and a few minutes before noon Benjamin, accompanied by the leader of the community, entered the colonnades of the square in front of Justinian's palace. Behind them came Jehoiakim, young and vigorous, bearing on his shoulders a heavy burden, which was carefully wrapped. Slowly, quietly, grave of mien, the two old men, plainly dressed in dark robes, made their way through the bronze portals of the reception room, behind which was the ornate throne-room of the Byzantine Emperor. They were, however, kept waiting a long time in the ante-room, for such was the custom at Byzantium, where envoys and suitors were to be taught by this expedient how exceptional was the privilege of being vouchsafed a glimpse of the countenance of the mightiest man on earth. One hour and a second and a third passed, but neither of the old men was offered stool or chair. Unfeelingly they were left to stand upon the cold marble. There streamed by in busy idleness an endless train of courtiers, fat eunuchs, guardsmen, and fantastically dressed menials; but no one troubled about the Jews, no one looked at them or spoke to them; while from the walls the impassive mosaics stared down upon them, while from the pillared cupola the lavish gold decorations mingled their splendours with those of the sunlight. Benjamin and the leader, of

the community stood patiently in silence. Being old men of an oppressed race they had learned to wait. Too long an experience had they had of the weary hours to trouble about the passing of one or two more. Only Jehoiakim, young and impatient, looked inquisitively at everyone who passed through, irritably counting the fragments of the mosaic, hoping thus to while away the time.

At length, when the sun was manifestly declining, the *praepositus sacri cubiculi* approached them and initiated them into the practices enjoined by the ritual of the Court upon anyone who was granted the privilege of looking upon the Emperor's countenance.

"As soon as the door opens," he said, "you must, with lowered heads, advance twenty paces to the place where a white vein is inserted into the coloured marble slabs on the floor; but no farther, lest your breath should mingle with that of His Majesty the Emperor. Before you venture to raise your eyes to look upon the autocrat you must prostrate yourself three times, arms and legs outspread upon the floor. Then only may you draw near to the porphyry steps of the throne, to kiss the hem of the *Basileus'* purple robe."

"No," interposed Jehoiakim hotly, though in low tones. "Only before God Almighty may we prostrate ourselves in that fashion, not before any mortal. I will not do it."

"Silence," answered Benjamin severely. "Why should I not kiss the earth? Did not God create it? Even if it were wrong to prostrate oneself before a mortal, still we may do wrong in a sacred cause."

At this moment the ivory-inlaid door leading into the throne-room opened. There emerged a Caucasian embassy which had come to pay homage to the Emperor. The door closed noiselessly behind them, and the aliens stood dumbfounded in their fur caps and their silken

robes. Their faces were distorted with anxiety. Obviously Justinian had given them a rough reception because they had offered him an alliance in the name of their people instead of making complete submission. Jehoiakim stared at the strangers curiously, taking note of their unusual attire. Then the *praepositus* ordered him to shoulder his burden and instructed the old men to do exactly what he had told them. He smote on the door gently with his golden staff, and produced a faint, ringing note. It opened from within, and thereupon the three visitors, joined by an interpreter at a sign from the *praepositus*, entered the spacious throne-room of the Emperor of Byzantium, the room known as the *consistorium*.

To right and left from the door to the middle of the huge apartment was ranged on each side a line of soldiers, and it was between these two lines that they had to advance. Each man stood to attention, dressed in a red uniform, sword strapped to his hips, wearing a gilded helmet decorated with a huge red horsetail, holding a long lance in his right hand, and having slung behind his shoulders a formidable battle-axe. As stiff and straight they stood as a wall of stone, all of the same height, and behind them, likewise, as if turned to stone, stood the leaders of the cohorts, holding banners. Slowly the three visitors and the interpreter advanced between these walls of impassive figures, whose eyes were as motionless as their bodies, none seeming to notice the newcomers. In silence they reached the further side of the room where doubtless (though they did not dare to raise their eyes) the Emperor was awaiting them. But when the *praepositus*, who preceded them with his golden staff uplifted, came to a halt, and, as was now permitted, they could raise their eyes towards the Emperor's throne, lo, there was no throne to be seen and no Emperor, but only a silken curtain stretched

across the hall and cutting the outlook. Motionless they stood there, staring at this coloured, arresting partition.

Once more the master of the ceremonies raised his staff. Thereupon the curtain parted in the middle and was drawn back to either side by unseen cords. Now, at the top of three porphyry steps, there was seen in the background the bejewelled throne on which sat the Basileus beneath a golden canopy. Stiffly he sat, looking more like a graven image than a human being, a corpulent and powerfully built man whose forehead vanished beneath the glittering crown which haloed his head. No less statue-like were the guardsmen, wearing white tunics, golden helmets, and golden chains round their necks, who formed a double circle round the monarch, while in front of these stood, equally statuesque, the Court dignitaries, the senators, wearing mantles of purple silk. They seemed neither to breathe nor to see; and it was plain that they were thus drilled into motionlessness and sightlessness that any stranger who for the first time glimpsed the ruler of the world should himself be petrified with veneration.

In fact, both the leader of the Jewish confraternity and Jehoiakim felt as if blinded like one unexpectedly thrust from darkness into strong sunlight. Only Benjamin, by far the oldest man in the room, looked steadily and imperturbably at Justinian. During his one lifetime ten emperors and rulers of Rome had mounted the throne and passed away. He knew well, therefore, that, for all their costly insignia and invaluable crowns, emperors did not differ from ordinary mortals who eat and drink, attend to the calls of nature, possess women, and die at last like anyone else. His soul was unshaken. Firmly he raised his eyes to look into those of the mighty Emperor, to whom he had come to beg a favour.

At this moment, from behind, he was warningly

touched on the shoulder by the golden staff, and was thus reminded of what custom prescribed. Difficult as it was for one whose limbs were stiffened by extreme old age, he flung himself upon the cold marble of the flooring, hands and feet outstretched. Thrice he pressed his forehead against the flooring, while his huge white beard rustled against the unfeeling stone. Then he arose, assisted by Jehoiakim, with lowered head advanced to the steps, and kissed the hem of the Emperor's purple robe.

The Basileus did not move, did not so much as flicker an eyelid. Sternly he looked, as it were, through the old man. It seemed to be indifferent to him, the Emperor, what might happen at his feet, and what worm might dare to touch the hem of his garment.

But the three, at a sign from the master of the ceremonies, had drawn back a little, and stood in a row, with the interpreter at a pace to the front to serve as their mouthpiece. Once more the praepositus raised his staff, and the interpreter began to speak. This man, he said, was a Jew, commissioned by the other members of his fraternity in Rome to bring the Emperor of the world thanks and congratulations for having avenged Rome upon the robbers and having freed seas and lands from these wicked pirates. Inasmuch as all the Jews in the world, who were His Majesty's faithful subjects, had learned that the Basileus, in his wisdom, had determined to build a new House of God in honour of sacred wisdom, Hagia Sophia, which was to be more splendid and more costly than any other temple yet built by the hands of men, they had, poor though they were, done their utmost to contribute a fragment to the sanctification of this edifice. Insignificant was their gift, in contrast with His Majesty's splendour, but still it was the greatest and most sacred object which had been preserved by them from ancient

days. Their forefathers, when driven out of Jerusalem, had carried with them a stone from the Temple of Solomon. This they had brought with them to-day, hoping that it might be inserted among the foundations of the new House of God, that the latter might contain a fragment from King Solomon's Holy House and be a blessing to the Holy House about to be built by Justinian.

Upon a sign from the *præpositus*, Jehoiakim carried the heavy stone to place it among the gifts which the Caucasian envoys had heaped up to the left of the throne—furs, Indian ivory, and embroidered cashmeres. But Justinian looked neither at the interpreter nor at the gift brought by the Jewish visitors. Bored and weary he stared into vacancy, and said, with a drowsy irritability mingled with contempt:

“Ask them what they want.”

In flowery metaphors the interpreter explained that among the magnificent spoils brought back from Carthage by Belisarius there was a trifle which happened to be peculiarly dear to the Jewish people. The Seven-Branched Lampstand which the Vandals had stolen from Rome and taken to Carthage had originally come from Solomon's Temple, built by the Jews in ancient days as the House of God. Therefore the Jews implored the Emperor to spare them this Lampstand, being ready to redeem it by paying twice its weight in gold, or, if need be, ten times its weight. There would not be a Jewish house or a Jewish hut throughout the world where the inmates would not daily pray for the health and welfare of the most gracious of all Emperors and for his long reign.

The eyes of the Basileus did not soften. Spitefully he answered:

“I do not wish those who are not Christians to pray for me. But ask them to explain more fully what concern

they have with this Lampstand, and what they propose to do with it."

The interpreter looked at Benjamin, translating these remarks, and a shudder seized the old man, who was chilled to the soul by Justinian's cold glances. He sensed resistance and hostility, so that he grew afraid that he would not prevail. Imploringly he raised his hand:

"Great Lord, bethink yourself, this is the only one of the holy treasures our people once possessed which still remains on earth. Our city did they batter down, our walls did they raze, our Temple did they destroy. Everything which we loved and owned and honoured has fallen into decay. One object only, this Lampstand, has lasted through the ages. It is thousands of years old, older than anything else on earth, and for centuries has it wandered homeless. While it continues to wander our people will know no rest. Lord, have pity on us. The Lampstand is the last of our sacred possessions. Restore it to us. Think how God raised you from among the lowly to place you upon the seats of the mighty, to make you wealthier than any other man on earth. It is the will of God that he shall give to whom it has been given. Lord, what is it to you, this wandering Lampstand? Lord, let there be an end of its wanderings and let it go home to rest."

Whatever the interpreter translated, he translated with courtly embellishments, and hitherto the Emperor had listened indifferently. But when, through the mouth of the interpreter, Benjamin reminded him that he had been lifted from a lowly place to become the mightiest of the mighty, his face darkened. Justinian was not fond of being told that he, now accounted semi-divine, had been born as the offspring of a poor peasant family in a Thracian village. He frowned, and was about to utter a curt refusal.

But with the watchfulness of anxiety Benjamin was quick to perceive the signs of imperial disfavour, and already fancied himself hearing the dreadful, the irrevocable No. His fears made him eloquent. As if propelled by an irresistible force from within, and forgetting the etiquette which forbade him to advance beyond the white vein in the marble floor, to the alarm of all present he stepped briskly towards the throne and raised his hands imploringly towards the Emperor, saying:

"Lord, your rule, your city are at stake. Be not presumptuous, nor try to keep what no one yet has been able to keep. Babylon was great, and Rome, and Carthage; but the temples have fallen which hid the Lampstand, and the walls have crashed which enclosed it. It alone, the Lampstand, remained unhurt, while everything around it fell in ruins. Should anyone try to seize it his arm is broken and withered; and anyone who deprives it of rest will himself suffer perpetual unrest. Woe to him who keeps what does not belong to him. God will give him no peace until he has returned this sacred emblem to the Holy City. Lord, I warn you. Give back the Lampstand."

The onlookers were struck dumb. Not one of them understood the wild words. But the courtiers witnessed with terror how a suitor had ventured what none had ever ventured before: in the heat of anger he had drawn close to the Emperor, and, with impetuous words, had interrupted the mightiest in the world when about to speak. Shudderingly they contemplated this old, old man, who stood there shaken by the intensity of his pain, with tears glistening in his beard while his eyes flashed with wrath. The leader of the Jewish fraternity, greatly alarmed, had retreated far into the background; the interpreter, too, had withdrawn to a distance. Thus Benjamin stood quite alone, face to face with the Basileus.

Justinian was startled out of his rigidity. He looked unsteadily at this wrathful old man, and impatiently bade the interpreter translate what had been said. The interpreter did so, toning the words down as much as he dared. Would His Majesty be gracious enough to pardon the aged stranger for a breach of etiquette, seeing that the Jew had in truth been driven beyond bounds by anxiety for the safety of the Empire? He had wished to warn His Majesty that God had laid a terrible curse upon this Lampstand. It would bring disaster upon any who should keep it, and whatever town should harbour it would be ravaged by enemies. The old man, therefore, had felt it his duty to warn His Majesty that the only way of escaping this curse would be to restore the Lampstand to the land of its origin, to send it back to Jerusalem.

The Emperor listened with bent brows. He was angered by the impudence of this irreverent old Jew who had raised voice and fist in the imperial presence. All the same, he was uneasy. Being of peasant origin he was superstitious, and like every child of fortune he believed in sorcery and signs. After thinking matters over for a while, he said dryly:

"So be it. Let the thing be taken from among the spoils of Carthage and sent to Jerusalem."

The old man quivered as the interpreter translated the Emperor's words. The joyful tidings illuminated his soul like a flash of lightning. His mission was fulfilled. For this moment had he lived. For this moment it was that God had spared his life so long. Almost unwittingly, he raised his left hand, the sound one, stretching it upward as if, in his gratitude, he hoped to touch the Almighty's footstool.

Justinian was quick to see how Benjamin's face was irradiated with joy, and a spiteful desire took possession of him. On no account would he permit the insolent

Jew to go back to his own people with the boast: "I have persuaded the Emperor and have won a victory." He smiled maliciously, saying;

"Don't rejoice before you have heard me out. 'It is not my purpose that the Lampstand shall belong to you Jews, shall be restored to you as one of the implements of your false religion.'"

Turning to Bishop Euphemius, who stood at his right hand, he went on:

"When you set forth at the new moon in order to consecrate the church which Theodora has founded in Jerusalem, you will take the Lampstand with you. Not that it may have its lamps lighted and stand upon the altar. You will place it unlighted beneath the altar, that everyone may see how our faith is high above theirs and how truth transcends error. It shall be safeguarded in the True Church, and not by those to whom the Messiah came and who failed to acknowledge him.'

The old man was terrified. Of course he had not understood the words spoken in a foreign tongue, but he had seen that Justinian's smile was ill-natured, and knew that the man of might must have said something intended to disappoint him. He wished to prostrate himself once more at the Emperor's feet and implore him to revoke whatever this last order could have been. But Justinian had already glanced at the *praepositus*. The latter raised his staff of office and the curtains rustled together. Emperor and throne vanished. The reception was over.

Benjamin stood dismayed, facing the partition. Then the master of the ceremonies, who was standing behind him, touched him on the shoulder with the golden wand as a sign of dismissal. Aided by Jehoiakim, Benjamin tottered out, his vision clouded. Once more God had rejected him at the moment when the sacred emblem was almost in his grasp. Again he had failed. The

Menorah still belonged to those who regarded might as right.

Benjamin walked no more than a few paces across the square outside the palace, when, again sorely tried, he staggered, and was about to fall. The leader of the community and Jehoiakim had all they could do to get him safe into an adjoining house, where they put him to bed. His face was deathly pale as he lay there scarcely breathing. They thought, indeed, that he was about to pass away, for even the uninjured arm hung flaccid, and the leader found it difficult to detect the beating of his heart, which fluttered irregularly. He remained unconscious for several hours, as if his last vain appeal to the Emperor had sapped what remained of his vital forces; but, when night fell, to the amazement of the two watchers, the man who had been so near to death came to himself and stared at them with a strange expression which suggested that he must be a visitant from the other world. Gradually recognizing them, he commanded (to their still greater astonishment) that they should remove him as speedily as possible to the synagogue in Pera, for he wished to bid farewell to the community. Vainly did they urge him to rest awhile longer until he had more fully recuperated; he stubbornly told them to do his bidding, and they had no choice but to obey. Hiring a litter, they had him carried to the Golden Horn, and ferried across to Pera by boat. During the transit he lay half asleep, without opening his eyes or uttering a word.

Long ere this had the Jews in Pera heard about the Emperor's decision. They had been so certain that the Lord would work a miracle that such a grudging return of the Menorah to Jerusalem could by no means satisfy them. This was an utterly inadequate fulfilment of their extravagant hopes. The trouble was not only that, the

Menorah was to be kept beneath the altar in a Christian church, but that they themselves were to remain in exile. Their own fate concerned them even more than that of the Lampstand. They looked like men stricken with apoplexy as they sat there gloomily, huddled up, and full of secret vexation. Hope told a flattering tale to him who was fool enough to believe it. Miracles were fine things to read about in Holy Writ, and were as beautiful as the bow in the cloud, which was a token of God's covenant made in the days when the Almighty was near to his creatures; but the time of miracles was over. God had forgotten his people, once the chosen, but now left unheeded in their sorrows and distresses. No longer did Jehovah send prophets to speak in his name. How foolish, then, to believe in uncertain signs or to expect wonders! The Jews in the synagogue at Pera ceased to pray and ceased to fast. Morosely they sat in the corners, munching bread and onions.

Now that the expectation of a miracle no longer made their eyes glisten and their foreheads shine, they had become once more the petty, plaintive beings they had been for so long, poor and oppressed Jews; and their thoughts, which so recently had soared Godward, again became commonplace and earthbound. They were traders and shopkeepers once more, with minds according. The envoys openly asked one another of what avail it had been to make a long and arduous journey, which had cost a lot of money. Why had they spent so much upon fine clothes that were now travel-worn? Why had they wasted their time and missed excellent opportunities of doing business? When they got home, the incredulous would make mock of them, and their wives would nag. And since the human heart is so constituted that it is ever prone, when hopes have been dashed, to show the strongest animus against all who awakened them, vexation was now concentrated upon the Roman

brethren and upon Benjamin, the false prophet. Sorely tried, was he? Well, he had been a sore trial. God did not love him, so why should they? When, after nightfall, Marnefesh turned up at the synagogue, they showed him plainly enough how their feelings towards him had changed. Not, as before, did they reverently draw near to him with cordial greetings. Deliberately they averted their countenances. Why should they bother themselves about him, the old Jew from Rome? He was no stronger than the rest of them; and God was as little interested in him as in their own sad fate.

Benjamin was quick to perceive the anger which underlay their aloofness, to perceive the discontent which alone could explain their cheerless silence. He was distressed to find that they looked at him askance, or would not even meet his eyes; and he could not but feel as if he must be to blame for their disappointment. He therefore begged the leader of the community to call them together, since he still had a word to say to them. Unwillingly, sullenly, they came out of their corners. What more could he wish to say to them, the man from Rome, the false prophet? Yet they could not but feel compassion when they saw him rise with difficulty from his seat and support himself on his stick, leaning forward, by far the oldest man in the company. He barely had strength to speak:

"I have come once more, brethren, this time to take leave of you. Also to humble myself before you. Not of set purpose have I brought you sorrow. As you all know, I did not wish to present myself before the Emperor. Yet I could not but comply with your request. When I was a little child the elders of our Roman community took me with them, having snatched me from sleep, I not knowing wherefore or whither. Always, after that night, they continued to tell me and others that the whole meaning of my life was to redeem the Menorah.

Believe me, brethren, it is terrible to be one whom God perpetually summons but to whom he never listens, one whom he lures onward with signs which he does not fulfil. Better that such a man should remain in obscurity where none can see him or hearken to him. I beg you, therefore, to forgive me, to forget me, and to make no further inquiries about me. Do not name the name of the failure who did you grievous wrong. Patiently await the coming of him who will, one day, deliver the Chosen People and the Menorah."

Thrice did Benjamin bow before the confraternity like a penitent who acknowledges his wrongdoing. Thrice did he strike his breast with his enfeebled left hand, while the other, the hand of the withered arm, hung motionless by his side; then he drew himself up and tottered towards the door. No one stirred, no one answered his words. But Jehoiakim, remembering that it was his duty to sustain the old man, hastened after him to the threshold. Benjamin, however, waved the youth away, saying:

"Return to Rome, and when the brethren there ask after me, say: 'Benjamin Marnefesh is no more, and was not appointed by God as a redeemer.' Tell them to forget my name and to say no prayers in memory of me. When I die I wish to be forgotten. Go in peace, and trouble yourself about me no longer."

Obediently Jehoiakim refrained from crossing the threshold. He gazed after the old man, wondering why Benjamin, walking with difficulty and supported by the staff, took the uphill direction. But he did not dare to follow, standing his ground at the door to watch the bowed figure out of sight.

That night, in his eighty-eighth year, Benjamin, who never before had lost patience, for the first time arraigned God. Confusedly, regarding himself as a hunted man, he groped his way through the narrow, winding alleys of Pera, not knowing his destination. His one wish was to

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flee from the shame of having led his people to entertain immoderate hopes. He would creep into some out-of-the-way corner where no one knew him and where he could die like a sick beast.

"After all, it was not my fault," he murmured again and again. "Why did they lay this burden upon me, expecting me to work a miracle? Why did they pick me out, me of all men?"

But these self-communings did not assuage him, as he was driven farther and farther by the fear that someone might follow him. At length he grew footsore and his knees trembled with fatigue. Sweat-drops beaded his wrinkled brow, tasted salt as they rolled between his lips while others fell into his beard. His tormented heart beat fitfully, and his breath came in gasps. But like a hunted animal, the aged man, still aided by his staff, mounted higher and higher along the steep path which led into the open, away from the houses. Never again did he wish to see or be seen by anyone. Away, away from dwellings and firesides, to lose himself, to be forever forgotten, enduringly delivered from the persistent illusion of deliverance.

Stumbling along, as unsteady on his feet as a drunkard, Benjamin at length reached the open hill-country behind the town, and there, as he leaned against a pine which, though he knew it not, kept watch over a tomb, he rested and recovered his breath. It was early autumn; the southern night was clear; the sea shone brightly under the moon, showing silver scales like a giant fish; while, like a serpent, close at hand was the channel of the Golden Horn. On the other side of this channel, Byzantium slumbered, its white turrets and cupolas glistening in the moonbeams. Very few lights were moving in the harbour, since it was after midnight; nor did there rise from the city any sound of human toil, but the breeze rustled gently through the vineyards, now

and then detaching a yellowed leaf from the withering vines, a leaf that fluttered silently to the ground. Somewhere close at hand must be wine-presses and wine-vaults, for down wind came the sour-sweet smell of must. This smell reminded him of the past, and with quivering nostrils the weary old man snuffed the odour of fermentation. The vine-leaves were sinking to earth, and would become earth again. Ah, could he himself but perish, be joined to earth as they were. Never did he wish to go back to live among his fellows, address himself to a fruitless task, torment himself anew. Let him be delivered, at length, from the burden of the flesh.

When, now, a sense of the prevailing stillness took possession of him, and he grew aware of being alone, he was more and more overmastered by the longing for eternal rest. Amid the silence, therefore, he raised his voice to God, half in complaint, and half in prayer.

"Lord, let me die. Why should I go on living, being useless to myself, and a scorn and a trouble to all with whom I come in contact? Why should you spare my life when you know that I do not wish to live? I have begotten sons, seven of them, each one a strong man in his time and eager for life; yet I, their father, shovelled the first earth into the graves of them all. A grandson didst thou give me, young and fair, too young to know the desire for women and the sweetness of life; but the heathen wounded him unto death. He did not wish to die; he did not wish to die. For four days, though wounded unto death, he struggled against death. Then, at last, didst thou take him, who wished to live, while me, who long to die, thou wilt not take. Lord, what dost thou want of me which I am not willing to do? When I was a little child they snatched me from my bed, and obediently I went whither I was told. Yet now, in my old age, I have had to deceive those who believed in me, and the signs which led them to believe in me

were false. Lord, let me be. I have failed; so fling me away. Eighty and eight years have I lived; eighty and eight years have I vainly waited to find a meaning in the length of my life and to do a deed which should prove me faithful to thy word. But I have grown weary. Lord, I am at the end of my strength. Lord, be content, and let me die."

Thus raising his voice, the old man prayed, with a yearning gaze directed heavenward, as he looked earnestly at the twinkling stars. He stood there, expecting God's answer. Surely an answer would come at last? Patiently he awaited this answer, but by degrees his uplifted hand sank slowly, and fatigue, intense fatigue, overcame him. His temples throbbed; his feet and knees gave way. Involuntarily he sank to the ground in a pleasant lassitude. Not wholly pleasant, indeed, for he felt as if he were bleeding to death, yet there was pleasure in this overpowering weakness.

"Death is taking me," he thought gratefully. "God has heard my prayer." Piously, tranquilly, he stretched his head upon the earth, which had the decaying odour of autumn.

"I ought to have put on my shroud," he reflected, but felt too tired to seek for it in his srip. Unconsciously he drew his cloak more closely around him. Then, closing his eyes, he confidently awaited the death for which he had prayed.

But not that night was death to visit Benjamin, the sorely tried. Gently he fell asleep, while his mind went on working in the imagery of a dream.

Here is the dream which Benjamin dreamed on that night of his last trial. Once more he was groping his way in flight, after darkness had fallen, through the narrow alleys of Pera; but that darkness was now darker than it had been before, while in the skies thick black

clouds hung low above the hilltops and the peaks. He had carried fear with him into dreamland, so that his heart throbbed violently when he heard footsteps on his trail; again he was seized with terror at the thought of being followed; and as he had fled when awake so did he now flee in his dream. But the footsteps continued, in front of him, behind him, to right and to left, all round him in the gloomy, vacant, black landscape. He could not see who those were that marched to right and to left, in front and behind, but there must be very many of them, a huge wandering company; he could distinguish the heavy tread of men, the lighter footsteps of women with clicking buckles on their shoes, and the pitter-patter of childish feet. It must be an entire people that marched along with him through the moonless, metallic night; a mourning and oppressed people. For continually he heard dull groans and murmurs and calls from their invisible ranks; and he felt convinced that they had been marching thus from time immemorial, being long since weary of their enforced wanderings, which led them they knew not whither.

"What is this lost people?" he heard himself asking. "Why do the skies lower over them, especially over them, in this way? Why should they never find rest?"

In his dream, however, he had no inkling who these wanderers might be; but he felt brotherly sympathy for them, and their yearning and groaning in the unseen impressed him more lamentably than would have loud complaint. Unwittingly he murmured:

"No one should be kept a-wander like this, always through the darkness, and never knowing whither. No people can continue to live thus without home and without goal, always afoot and always in peril. A light must be kindled for them, a way must be shown them, or else this hunted, lost people will despair and will wither into nothingness. Someone must lead them, must

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lead them home, throwing light on the path for them all. A light must be found, they need light."

His eyes tingled with pain, so full of compassion was he for this lost people which, gently complaining and reduced to despair, marched onward through the silent and lowering night. But as he, likewise despairing, plumbed the distance with his gaze, it seemed to him as if, at the farthest limits of his vision, a faint light began to glow, the merest trace of a light, a spark or two, resembling a will-o'-the-wisp.

"We must follow that light," he murmured. "Even if it be no more than a jack-o'-lantern. Perhaps, though it is a small light, we can kindle at it a great one. We must follow it and catch up with it, that light."

In his dream Benjamin forgot that his limbs were old and feeble. Like an active boy, like the heathen god who was fabled to wear winged sandals, he speeded in pursuit of the light. He pushed forward fiercely through the murmuring, shadowy crowd, which made way for him mistrustfully and angrily.

"Keep your eyes fixed on the light, that light over there," he called to them encouragingly. Nevertheless this depressed people moved on sluggishly, hanging their heads and groaning as they went. They could not see that distant light: perhaps their eyes were blinded with tears and their hearts weakened by their daily distresses. He himself, however, perceived the light ever more plainly. It consisted of seven little sparks which flickered side by side, looking like seven sisters. As he ran on and drew nearer, while his heart throbbed violently with exertion and excitement, he saw that in front of him there must be a Lampstand, Seven-Branded, which sustained and fed these little flames. That was but a guess, for the Lampstand itself was not yet visible. Nor could it be standing still, for it, too, was a-wanderer, even as the people who surrounded him were a-wanderer in

the darkness, mysteriously hunted and driven as by an evil wind. That was why the flames that flew before him did not show a steady light, nor a strong one, but flickered uncertainly.

"We must grasp it, must bring it to rest, the Lampstand," thought the dreamer, while the dream-image fled before him, "for it will burn brightly and steadily and clearly as soon as it is at rest."

Blindly he ran onward to reach it, and nearer and nearer did he come to the Lampstand. Already he could see the golden stem and the upstanding branches, and in the seven knops of gold the seven flames, each of them blown flat by the wind which continued to drive the Lampstand farther and farther across lowland and mountain and sea.

"Stay! Halt awhile!" he shouted. "The people is perishing. It needs the consolation of the light, and cannot for ever and ever wander like this through the darkness."

But the Lampstand continued to advance, while its fleeing flames shone craftily and angrily. Then the hunter, too, grew wrathful. Summoning the last of his forces, for his heart was now beating furiously, he made a huge leap forward to grasp the fugitive Lampstand. Already his grip had closed upon the cool metal; already he had clenched his hand upon the heavy stem—when a thunderbolt struck him to earth, splintering his arm. He yelled with the pain, and as he did so there came an answering cry from the pursuing masses: "Lost! For ever lost!"

But see, the storm abated, the Lampstand ceased its wandering flight, to stand still and magnificent. Not to stand on the ground, but in the air, firm and upright, as if on an iron pedestal. Its seven flames, which had hitherto been pressed flat by the power of the wind, now streamed steadily upward in their golden splendour,

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giving off a more and more brilliant light. By degrees, so strong grew this light that the whole expanse of heaven into which they shone was golden. As the man who had been struck down by the thunderbolt looked up confusedly to see those who had been wandering behind him through the darkness he became aware that there was no longer night upon a trackless earth, and that those who had been following him were no more a wandering people. Fruitful and peaceful, cradled in the sea and shaded by mountains, was a southern land where palms and cedars swayed in a gentle breeze. There were vineyards, too, thick with grape-clusters; fields of yellow grain; pastures swarming with sheep; gentle-footed gazelles at play. Men were quietly at work upon their own land, drawing water from the wells, driving ploughs, milking cows, sowing and harrowing and harvesting; surrounding their houses with beds of brightly coloured flowers. Children were singing songs and playing games. Herdsmen made music with their pipes; when night fell the stars of peace shone down upon the slumbering houses.

"What country is this?" the astonished dreamer asked himself in his dream. "Is this the same people that groaned and lamented as it fled through the darkness? Has it at length found peace? Has it, at long last, reached home?"

Now the Lampstand rose higher in the sky and shone more gloriously. Its lights were like the light of the sun, illuminating sky and land to the very horizon. The mountain tops were revealed in its sheen; upon one of the lower hills gleamed white with mighty turrets a magnificent city, and amid the turrets projected a gigantic House built of hewn stone. The sleeper's heart throbbed once more.

"This must be Jerusalem and the Temple," he panted. Thereupon the Lampstand moved on toward the city

and the Temple. The walls gave way as if they had been water to let it pass, and now, as it flamed within the Holy Place, the Temple shone white like alabaster.

"The Lampstand has returned home," muttered the sleeper. "Someone has been able to do what I have ever yearned to do. Someone has redeemed the wandering Lampstand. I must see it with my own eyes, I, the witness. Once more, once more, I shall behold the Menorah at rest in God's Holy Place."

As the winds carry a cloud, so did his wish carry him whither he wanted to go. The gates sprang open to admit him and he entered the Holy of Holies to behold the Lampstand. Incredibly strong was the light. Like white fire the seven flames of the Lampstand blazed up together in one huge flame, so bright that it dazzled and hurt. He cried aloud in his dream and awoke.

Benjamin had awakened from his dream. But still the intense light of that flame glowed into his eyes, so that he had to close the lids to protect them from the glare, and even then the light shone through them sparkling and purple. Only as he raised his hand to shade them did he become aware that it was the sun which was scorching his forehead; that, in the spot where he had sought to die, he had slept until well on in the morning, when the sun was high; and that it was the sunlight which had roused him. The tree beneath which he had fallen asleep had not been enough to protect him from the dazzling rays. Having risen to his feet with some difficulty, he leaned against the tree trunk, looking out into the distance. There lay the sea, blue and boundless, as he had seen it when a child at Portus, even as he was now contemplating the Euxine. Landward shone the marble and other stone buildings of Byzantium. The world displayed the colour and sheen of a southern

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morning. After all, it had not been God's will that he should die. In a fright the old man leaned forward and bowed his head in prayer.

When Benjamin had finished his prayer to the Almighty, who gives life at his will and does not end it until he chooses, he felt a gentle touch on his shoulder from behind. It was Zechariah who stood there, as Benjamin instantly recognized, being now fully awake. Before the old man could give vent to his astonishment—for he wondered how the goldsmith could have discovered him—Zechariah whispered:

"Since early morn I have been seeking you. When they told me in Pera that, on quitting the synagogue, you had wandered uphill through the darkness, I could not rest until I found you. The others were extremely anxious about you. Not I, however, for I knew that God still has a use for you. Come back with me to my home. I have a message for you."

"What message?" Benjamin had it in mind to say. "I want no more messages"—so ran his stubborn thoughts—"for God has tried me too often."

But he did not utter these refractory words, being still consoled by the wonder of his dream and by the remembrance of the blessed light which had shone upon that land of peace—the light which seemed to have left a reflection upon the smiling countenance of his friend. Without refusing the invitation, therefore, he walked down the hill with Zechariah. They crossed the Golden Horn in a boat, and soon reached the walled quadrant of the palace. There was a strong guard at the gates, but, to Benjamin's amazement, they allowed Zechariah and his companion to pass freely.

"My workshop," the goldsmith explained, "adjoins the treasury, for there, in secret and fully safeguarded from danger, I can do my work for the Emperor. Enter, and blessed be your coming. There will be

no one else to trouble you. We are and shall remain alone."

The two men stepped lightly through the workshop, which was full of artistically fashioned trinkets. In the farther wall the goldsmith opened a concealed door, which led down two or three steps into an apartment behind, where he lived and did his more special work. The shutters were closed and heavily barred, the rooms being lighted only by a shaded lamp which cast a golden circle upon the table, at the back of which was an object hidden by a purple cloth.

"Sit down, dear Benjamin," said Zechariah to his guest. "You must be hungry and tired."

He thrust aside the work on which he had last been engaged, brought bread and wine and some beautifully wrought silver saucers containing fresh fruit, dates, almonds, and other nuts. Then he tilted back the lampshade, so that the greater part of the table was lighted, as were the clasped hands of Benjamin—the gnarled and parchmented hands of a very old man.

"Please break your fast," said Zechariah encouragingly. To Benjamin, the man sorely tried, the voice of him who had till so recently been a stranger came to his ears as softly as a gentle breeze from the west. He ate some of the fruit, slowly crumbled bread and took a few mouthfuls, washing it down with small gulps of the wine which shone purple in the lamplight. He was glad to hold his peace while collecting his forces, and was content that above the lighted table the room was in darkness. His feelings towards Zechariah were those which a man has to an old and trusted friend. Now and again, though Zechariah's head was in shadow, Benjamin studied what he could see of the face with thoughtful tenderness.

As if recognizing that his guest desired closer scrutiny

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Zechariah took the shade off the lamp. Thereupon the whole room was illuminated, and for the first time Benjamin got a clear view of his new friend. Zechariah's face was delicately moulded and weary, as that of a man whose health left a good deal to be desired; it was deeply furrowed with the marks of suffering silently and patiently borne. When Benjamin looked at him the goldsmith smiled responsively, and this smile gave the old man courage.

"How differently you feel towards me from the others. They are angry with me because I have not worked a miracle, although I implored them not to expect one from me. You alone are not incensed against me, you, who made it possible for me to have audience of the Emperor. All the same, they are right to make mock of me. Why did I awaken their hopes, why did I come hither? Why should I go on living, merely to see how the Lampstand wanders afresh and eludes us?"

Zechariah continued to smile, a gentle smile which brought balm and healing. He said:

"Do not kick against the pricks. Perhaps it was too soon, and the way we tried was not the right one. After all, what can we do with the Lampstand so long as the Temple lies in ruins and our people is still scattered among the Gentiles? It may be God's will that the Menorah's destiny shall remain mysterious, and not be plainly disclosed to the people."

The words were consoling and warmed Benjamin's heart. He bowed his head and spoke as if to himself:

"Forgive me my lack of courage. My life has grown narrow and I must be very near to death. Eight and eighty years have I lived, so perhaps it is natural that I should lose patience. Since, as a child, I tried to rescue the Lampstand I have lived for one thing—its redemption and its return to Jerusalem; and from year to year

I have been faithful and patient. But now that I am so old what can I hope from waiting?"

"You will not have to wait. Soon all will be fulfilled."

Benjamin stared, but his heart beat hopefully.

Zechariah smiled yet more cheerfully, saying: "Do you not feel that I came to bring you a message?"

"What message?"

"The message you expected."

Benjamin quivered to his finger-tips.

"You mean, you mean, that the Emperor might receive me again in audience?"

"No, not that. What he has spoken, he has spoken. He will never eat his words, and will not give us back the Menorah."

"What, then, is the use of my remaining alive? Why should I wait here, plaintive, a burden to everyone, while the holy symbol leaves us, and this time for ever?"

Zechariah continued to smile, yet more confidently—a smile which made his face glow:

"The Lampstand has not yet departed from among us."

"How can you tell? How can you say such a thing?"

"I know. Trust me."

"You have seen it?"

"I have seen it. Two hours ago it was still locked in the treasury."

"But now? They must have taken it away."

"Not yet. Not yet."

"Then where is it now?"

Zechariah did not answer immediately. Twice his lips were tremulous with the beginnings of speech, but the words did not come. At length he leaned forward over the table and whispered:

"Here. In my dwelling. Close to us."

Benjamin's face twitched.

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"You have it here?" he asked.

"It is here in my dwelling."

"Here in your dwelling?"

"In this dwelling, in this very room. That is why I sought you out."

Benjamin quivered. In Zechariah's tranquillity there was something which stupefied him. Without knowing it he folded his hands, and whispered almost inaudibly:

"Here in this room? How can that be?"

"Strange as it may seem to you, there is nothing miraculous about it. For thirty years, more than twenty of them before Justinian began to reign, I have worked as goldsmith in the palace, and in all that time naught has been placed in the treasury, naught of value, without being sent first to me, for me to weigh it and test it. I knew that all the spoils brought back by Belisarius after overthrowing the Vandals would take the usual path, and the first of them for which I asked was the Menorah. Yesterday the treasurer's slaves brought it here; it is beneath that purple cloth, and it is entrusted to me for a week."

"And then?"

"Then it will be shipped to Jerusalem."

Benjamin turned pale. Why had Zechariah summoned him? Only that he should once more have the Menorah, the sacred emblem, within his grasp for a moment—to pass anew into the hands of the Gentiles? But Zechariah smiled meaningly, saying:

"I should tell you that I am permitted to make duplicates of all the precious objects in the imperial treasury. Often they specially ask me to make such a replica, for they esteem my craftsmanship. The crown that Justinian wears is a copy of Constantine's, and of my making; in like manner Theodora's diadem is the duplicate of one which Cleopatra used to wear. I therefore begged per-

mission to make a duplicate of the Menorah before it was sent to that church of theirs across the sea, and I actually began the work this morning. The crucibles are already heated and the gold is made ready. In a week from now the new Lampstand will be finished, so like our own that no one will be able to distinguish it, since it will be of precisely the same weight and will show no unlikeness in shape or ornamentation or even in the graining of the gold. The only difference will be that one will be sacred and the other wholly the work of an ordinary mortal like myself. But as to which is the sacred Lampstand and which the profane, which one we piously cherish and which one we hand over to the keeping of the Gentiles—that will be a secret known only to two persons in the world. It will be your secret and mine.”

Benjamin's lips no longer trembled. His whole frame tingled with the rush of blood, his chest expanded, his eyes sparkled, and a cheerful smile which was the reflection of Zechariah's lit up his aged face. He understood. What he had once attempted this fellow-countryman of his would now achieve. Zechariah would redeem the Lampstand from the Gentiles, handing over to them one exactly alike in gold and in weight but keeping back the sacred Menorah. Not for a moment did he envy Zechariah the wonderful deed to which he had consecrated his own long life. Humbly he said:

“God be praised. Now I shall gladly die. You have found the path which I vainly sought. God merely called me, but you hath he blessed.”

Zechariah protested:

“No, you, and you alone, must take the Menorah home.”

“Not I, for I am so very, very old. I should be likely to die upon the journey. And thence, once more, the Lampstand would fall into the hands of the Gentiles.”

Zechariah answered, with a confident smile:

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"You will not die. It has already been revealed to you that your life will not pass away until its meaning has been fulfilled."

Benjamin bethought himself. Yesterday he had wished to die and God had refused to grant him his prayer. Perhaps his mission had, after all, to be fulfilled. He raised no further objection, merely saying:

"I will be guided by your promptings. Why, indeed, should I resist if God has chosen me? Go on with your work."

For a week Zechariah's workshop was closed to all access. For a week the goldsmith did not set foot in the street nor open his door to any knock. Before him on a lofty stand, was the eternal Menorah, serene and splendid, as of yore it had stood before the Altar of the Lord. In the furnace the fire licked silently at the crucibles with tongues of flame, melting down rings and clasps and coins to provide gold for the beaten work. Benjamin spoke hardly a word during this week. He looked on while the precious metal fused in the melting-pot, whence it was poured into the mould, and hardened as it cooled. When, with great care, skilfully plying the tools of his trade, Zechariah broke away the mould, the shape of the new Lampstand was already recognizable. Strong and proudly rose the stem from the broad base, and, thinning, this stem ran straight upward to the central chalice. On either side curved away three stalks from the main shaft, each ending in its own chalice to hold oil for a burning wick. As the goldsmith hammered and chiselled the appropriate ornamentations began to show everywhere—the bowls, and the knops, and the flowers. From day to day the counterfeit came to resemble more and more closely the true Menorah. On the last, the seventh day, the two Seven-Branched Candlesticks stood side by side like twin brethren, indis-

tinguishable from each other, being exactly of the same size and tint, measure and weight. Unrestingly, with practised gaze, Zechariah continued to work at the counterfeit until, down to the minutest traces, it was a truthful representation of the true. At length his hands rested from their task. Indeed, so closely alike were the two Lampstands that Zechariah, fearing lest even he might be deceived, took up his graving-tool once more, and within the pistil of one of the flowers made a tiny mark to prove the new Lampstand to be his own work, and not the Lampstand of the Jewish people and of the Temple.

This done, he stepped backward, took off his leather apron, and washed his hands. After six days' labour, on the seventh, the Sabbath, he addressed Benjamin once more :

"My work is finished. Yours now begins. Take our Lampstand and do what you think best with it."

But, to his surprise, Benjamin refused :

"For six days you have worked, and for six days I have thought and have questioned my heart. I have grown uneasy with wondering whether we are not cheats. You received one Lampstand and you will give back another to him who trusted you. It is not meet that we should return the false Lampstand and keep, by crooked wiles, that which was not freely given to us. God does not approve of force ; and when I, as a child, tried to take the sacred emblem by force, he shattered my arm. But I am equally sure that God disapproves of fraud, and that when a man cheats, the Almighty will consume his soul as with fire."

Zechariah reflected, and answered :

"But what if the treasurer should himself choose the false Lampstand?"

Benjamin looked up, to answer :

"The treasurer knows that one is old and the other

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new, and if he should ask which of the two is genuine we must tell him the truth and restore to him the genuine emblem. If God should so dispose that the treasurer asks no questions, considering that the two are precisely the same, because there is no difference in the gold or in the weight, then, to my way of thinking, we should do no wrong. If he, deciding for himself, chooses the Lampstand which you have made, then God will have given us a sign. Let not the decision be made by us."

Zechariah, therefore, sent one of the slaves of the treasury to summon the treasurer, and the treasurer came, a corpulent and cheerful man with small, protruding eyes which sparkled above his red cheeks. In the ante-room, with the airs and graces of a connoisseur, he examined two saucers of beaten silver which had recently been finished, tapping each of them with his fingers, and examining the delicate chasing. Inquisitively he lifted one gem after another from the worktable and held them against the light. So lovingly did he inspect piece after piece, both the finished and the unfinished work of the goldsmith, that Zechariah had to remind him he had come to see the Lampstands, which were awaiting his judgment, the Menorah which was thousands of years old and the one which had just been made, the original and the copy.

All attention now, the treasurer stepped up to the table. It was obvious that, as an expert, he would have been glad to find some trifling defect or half-hidden flaw which would enable him to distinguish the newly made Lampstand from the one which Belisarius had taken from the Vandals in Carthage. Lifting each in turn he twisted them in all directions, so that the light fell on them from various angles. He weighed them, he scratched at the gold with his finger nails. Stepping back and drawing near again he compared them with increasing interest, acknowledging to himself that he

could detect no difference. At length, stooping till he was quite close, and using a magnifying glass of cut crystal, he studied the minutest marks of the graving-tool. The two Lampstands seemed to him precisely alike. Outwearied by this lengthy comparison, he clapped Zechariah on the shoulder, saying:

"You are indeed a master goldsmith, being yourself the greatest treasure of our treasury. For all eternity no one will be able to tell which is the old Lampstand and which the new one, so sure is the work of your hand. You have made a superlative copy."

He turned indifferently away to scrutinize the cut gems and choose one of them for himself. Zechariah had to remind him:

"Tell me then, Treasurer, which of the Lampstands will you have?"

Without glancing at them again the treasurer replied:

"Whichever you like. I don't care."

Then Benjamin emerged from the dark corner to which he had discreetly retired:

"Lord, we beg you to choose for yourself one of the two."

The treasurer looked at the speaker in astonishment. Why did this stranger stare at him so eagerly, so imploringly? But, being a good-natured fellow, and too civil not to accede to an old man's whim, he turned back to the show-table. In merry mood he took a coin from his pocket and tossed it high in the air. It fell and rolled along the floor, this way and that, but at length settled down towards his left hand. With a smile the treasurer pointed to the Lampstand which stood to the left, and said: "That one for me." Then he turned and charged the slave who was in waiting to carry this Lampstand to the Emperor's treasure-chamber. Thankfully and courteously the goldsmith ushered his patron to the door.

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Benjamin had stayed in the inner room. With tremulous hand he touched the Menorah. It was the genuine one, the sacred one, for the treasurer had chosen the replica.

When Zechariah came back, he found Benjamin standing motionless in front of the Menorah, looking at it so earnestly that it seemed as if he must be absorbing the sacred emblem into himself. When at length he turned to face Zechariah, the reflection of the gold gleamed, as it were, from his pupils. The man sorely tried had gained that tranquillity which comes from a great and satisfactory decision. Gently he uttered a request:

"May God show you his thanks, my brother. I have one thing more to ask of you, a coffin."

"A coffin?"

"Be not astonished. This matter, too, I have thought over during these seven days and nights—how we can best give the Lampstand peace. Like you, my first thought was that if we should succeed in rescuing the Menorah it ought to belong to our people, which should preserve it as the most sacred of pledges. But our people, where is it, and where its abiding place? We are hunted hither and thither, only tolerated at best whithersoever we go. There is no place known to me where the Lampstand could be kept in safety. When we have a house of our own we are liable from moment to moment to be driven out of it; where we build a Temple, the Gentiles destroy it; as long as the rule of force prevails the Menorah cannot find peace on earth. Only under the earth is there peace. There the dead rest from their wanderings; if there be gold there it is not seen, and therefore cannot stimulate greed. In peace, the Menorah, having returned home after a thousand years of wanderings, can rest under the ground."

STORIES AND LEGENDS

"For ever?" Zechariah was astounded. "Do you mean to bury the Menorah for ever?"

"How can a mortal talk of for ever? Who can tell, when man proposes, that God will dispose accordingly for ever? I want to put the Lampstand to rest, but God alone knows how long it will rest. I can do a deed, but what will be the upshot thereof I cannot tell, who, like a mortal, must think in terms of time and not of eternity. God will decide, he alone shall determine the fate of the Menorah. I intend to bury it, for that seems to me the only way to keep it safe—but for how long I cannot tell. Perhaps God will leave it for ever in darkness, and in that case our people must wander for ever unconsolated, dispersed like dust, scattered over the face of the earth. Maybe, however, and my heart is full of hope, maybe he will one day decide that our people shall return home. Then—you can believe as I believe—he will choose one who by chance will thrust his spade where the Menorah lies and will find the buried treasure, as God found me, to bring the weary Lampstand to its rest. Do not trouble yourself about the decision, which we shall leave to God and to time. Even though the Lampstand should be accounted lost, we, the Chosen People, fulfilling one of God's mysterious purposes, shall not be lost. Just as the Chosen People will not fade out of existence in the obscurity of time, so gold that is buried underground does not crumble or perish as will our mortal bodies. Both will endure, the Chosen People and the Menorah. Let us have faith, then, that the Menorah which we are about to inter will rise again some day to shed new light for the Chosen People when it returns home. Faith is the one thing that matters, for only while our faith lasts shall we endure as a people."

For a while the two men were silent, their inward gaze fixed upon the distant prospect. Then Benjamin said once more:

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"Now order me the coffin."

The joiner brought the coffin, which was, in appearance, like any other, as Benjamin had requested. It must not be of peculiar aspect, so as to attract attention when he took it with him to the land of his fathers. Often the pious Jews bore coffins with them on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, in order to inter the corpse of some near relative in the Holy Land. He need have no anxiety about the Lampstand when it was hidden away in a deal coffin, for no one is inquisitive about the bodies of the dead.

Reverently the two men put the Menorah away in its resting-place, as reverently as if it had been a corpse. The branches were wrapped in silken cloths and heavy brocade, as the Torah is wrapped whenever it is put away, the vacant spaces being stuffed with tow and cotton-wool, that there might be no rattling to betray the secret. Thus softly did they bed the Menorah in the coffin, which is the cradle of the dead, knowing, as they did so, that, unless God willed to change the fortune of the Jewish people, they were probably the last who would ever look upon and handle the Lampstand of Moses, the sacred Lampstand of the Temple. Before closing the coffin they took a sheet of parchment and wrote thereon a statement to the effect that they two, Benjamin Marnefesh, known as the sorely tried, descendant of Abtalion, and Zechariah, of the blood of Hillel, had, at Byzantium, in the eighth year of the reign of Justinian, here deposited the holy Menorah, bearing witness to any who might, peradventure, one day disinter it in the Holy Land that this was the true Menorah. Having rolled up the parchment, they enveloped it in lead which was hermetically sealed by Zechariah, the cunning worker in metal, that the container should be impermeable to damp. With a golden chain he secured it to the shaft of the Lampstand. This done, they closed

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the coffin with nails and clasps. Not a word more did either say to the other about the matter until the bondmen had brought the coffin to Benjamin on board the ship which was about to set sail for Joppa. The sails were being hoisted when Zechariah took leave of his friend and kissed him, saying:

"God bless you and guard you. May he guide you on your path and help you to fulfil your undertaking. To this hour we two and none others have known the fate of the Lampstand. Henceforward that fate will be known to you alone."

Benjamin inclined his head reverently:

"My knowledge cannot last much longer. When I am dead God alone will know where his Menorah rests."

As usual when a ship enters port, a crowd assembled on the quay in Joppa when the boat from Byzantium came to anchor. There were some Jews among these onlookers. Recognizing by his appearance and raiment that the white-bearded old Benjamin was one of their own people, and perceiving that the shipmen followed him ashore bearing a coffin, they formed up to follow in a silent procession. It was traditional among them, when such an event chanced, to accompany the corpse, even of an unknown compatriot, a few steps upon the last journey—to be helpful and reverent. When the news spread abroad through the town that an aged member of their people had brought the remains of a relative across the sea to be interred in the Holy Land all the members of the community left work to join in the procession, which grew continually in length until the bearers reached the inn where Benjamin was to pass the night. Not until the old man had (strangely enough, as it seemed to them) arranged for the coffin to be placed on trestles beside the spot where he was to sleep, did

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these followers break silence. They invoked a blessing on the traveller, and then asked him whence he had come and whither he was going.

Benjamin was chary of words, being afraid lest tidings might have come from Byzantium and that one of those who had flocked together might identify him. The last thing he desired was to raise fresh hopes among the brethren. Nevertheless he could not bring himself to utter anything that was not absolutely true when he stood so near the Menorah. He begged them, therefore, to excuse his reticence. He had been charged to bring this coffin to Palestine, and was not permitted to say any more. To ward off further inquiries he asked questions of his own.

"Where," he said, "shall I find a holy place in which I can lay this coffin to rest?"

The Jews of Joppa smiled proudly, and replied:

"This, brother, is the Holy Land, and every spot of ground in it is therefore consecrated."

However, they went on to tell him of all the places where, in caves, or in the open fields (marked in the latter case only by cairns) were the tombs of their fathers and forefathers, of the mothers of the tribe, of the heroes and kings of the Jewish people; and they vaunted the holiness of these same places. Every pious member of their fraternity visited them from time to time, seeking strength and consolation. Since the old man's appearance inspired respect, they said:

"Gladly, brother, will we show you a suitable place, and go with you to join in prayer when the unknown dead is interred."

Benjamin, however, eager to preserve his secret, declined their aid courteously, saying that privacy for the burial was enjoined on him by the nature of his mission. Only when the visitors had retired did he ask the inn-keeper to find someone who, on the morrow, for a good

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wage, would take him to a suitable place and dig a grave. A mule would also be needed to carry the coffin. The host promised that his own servant and his own beast should be ready at dawn to do whatever the visitor required.

This night in the inn at Joppa was marked by the last hours of painful questioning and of holy torment in the life of Benjamin, the sorely tried. Once again he doubted; once again did his resolution fail. Once more he asked himself whether it could really be right for him to withhold from his brethren the news of the rescue of the Menorah and of its return to the Holy Land; right to say nothing to the members of the Jewish congregation in Joppa about the sacred emblem which was about to be interred. For if the members of his afflicted race could draw so much consolation from visiting the tombs of their forefathers, what would it not mean to them, to those who were hunted and persecuted and blown hither and thither by all the winds of heaven, if they could but receive the slightest intimation that the eternal Menorah, the most visible token of their unity, was not really lost but had been redeemed, and was to rest securely underground in the Holy Land until, in the fullness of time, the whole Jewish congregation would likewise return home.

"How dare I withhold from them this hope and consolation?" he murmured to himself, as he tossed sleeplessly on his pallet. "How can I venture to keep the secret, taking with me into the tomb information which might give joy to thousands? I know how they thirst for comfort. What a terrible fate is it for a people to be kept in unceasing expectation, feeding upon thoughts of 'some day' and 'perhaps'; relying dumbly upon the written word and never receiving a sign! Yet only if I keep silent will the Menorah be preserved for the people. Lord, help me in my distress. How can I do right by

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the brethren? May I tell the servant whom my host has placed at my disposal that we have buried a sacred pledge? Or should I hold my peace, that no one may know where the Lampstand, has been laid to rest? Lord, decide for me. Once before thou gavest me a sign. Give me another. Relieve me of the burden of decision."

No voice came in answer through the silence of the night, nor would sleep visit the eyes of the man sorely tried. He lay awake hour after hour, his temples throbbing, as he asked himself the same perpetual round of unanswerable questions, and became more and more entangled in the net of his fears and sorrows. Already light was showing in the eastern sky, and the old man had not yet decided upon his course, when, with troubled countenance, the innkeeper entered the room, to say:

"Forgive me, brother, but I cannot provide you with the servant I spoke of yesterday, the man well acquainted with the neighbourhood. He has fallen sick during the night. Foam issued from his mouth, and now he has been smitten with a burning fever. The only man available is my other servant, a stranger from a far country and dumb to boot. It has been God's will that since birth he has been able neither to hear nor to speak. Still, if he will serve your turn, he is at your disposal."

Benjamin did not look at the innkeeper, but raised his eyes gratefully heavenward. God had answered his prayer. A dumb man had been sent to him in sign of silence. A stranger, too, from a far country, that the place of burial might remain for ever hidden. He hesitated no longer, and answered the host, saying thankfully:

"Send me the dumb man. He will suit my purpose excellently, and I shall be able to find the way."

From morn till eve, Benjamin, with his dumb companion, crossed the open country. Behind them came the patient mule, the coffin tied across its back. From time to time they passed wayside huts, the dwellings of impoverished peasants, but Benjamin did not pause. When he encountered other travellers, he shunned conversation, merely exchanging the usual greeting of "Peace be unto you." He was eager to finish his task, that he might know the Menorah to be safe underground. The place was still uncertain, and some mysterious intimation withheld him from making his own choice. His thoughts ran as follows:

"Twice I have been given a sign and I will await a third."

Thus the little procession moved through the darkling land. The sky was obscured by clouds, though fitfully, between rifts in these, the moon glimmered, nearing the zenith. It was perhaps a league from the next village, where rest and shelter might be found. Benjamin strode on sturdily, followed by the silent servitor, who shouldered a spade, and behind the pair walked the mule with its burden.

Suddenly the beast stopped short. The man seized the bridle and tugged, but the mule, planting his forefeet, refused to budge. "I have had enough of it," he seemed to say, "and will go no farther." Angrily the attendant lifted the spade, intending to belabour the animal's flanks, but Benjamin laid a hand upon the raised arm. Perhaps this balking of the pack mule was the sign for which he had been waiting.

Benjamin looked around him. The dark, rolling landscape was forsaken. There was sign neither of house nor of hut. They must have strayed aside from the road to Jerusalem. Yes, this was a suitable place where the interment could be effected unobserved. He thrust at the earth with his staff. It was soft, not stony, and would

be easy for the digger. But he must find the exact spot.

He glanced uncertainly to right and to left. There, to the right, a hundred paces or so away, stood a tree, recalling the one beneath which he had slept on the hill above Pera, and where he had had the reassuring dream. As he recalled that dream his heart was uplifted. The third sign had come. He waved to the dumb man, who unbound the coffin from the beast's back, and, on the instant, the mule, relieved of the burden, trotted up to him and nuzzled his fingers. Yes, God had given him a sign. This was the place. He pointed to the ground, and the servitor began to dig busily. Soon the grave was deep enough. Now there remained only the last thing to do—to commit the Lampstand to its tomb. The unsuspecting deaf-mute lifted the burden in his strong arms and carefully lowered it into the grave. There lay the coffin, a wooden vestment for the last sleep of its precious golden contents, soon to be covered by the breathing, life-giving, ever-living earth.

Benjamin stooped reverently.

"I am still the witness, the last," he mused, trembling beneath the burden of his thoughts. "No one on earth save me knows the secret resting-place of the Menorah. Except for me, no one guesses its hidden tomb."

At this moment the moon shone once more through the clouds. It was as if a huge eye had suddenly appeared in the heavens lidded by dark vapours. Not like a mortal eye, perishable, and fringed by lashes, but an eye that was hard and round, as if chiselled out of ice, eternal and indestructible. It stared down, throwing its light into the depths of the open grave, disclosing the four corners of the tomb, while the white pinewood of the coffin shone like metal. No more than a momentary glance and the moon was again obscured; but a glance

that seemed to come from an enormous distance before the eye was hidden as the clouds regathered. Benjamin knew that another eye than his had espied the burial of the Menorah.

At a fresh sign the servitor shovelled in the earth and made all smooth above the tomb. Then Benjamin waved to him to depart, to return home, taking with him the mule. The man wrung his hands and showed reluctance. He did not wish to leave this aged and fragile stranger by night in so solitary a place, where there was danger of robbers and wild beasts. Let him at least accompany Benjamin to some human habitation, where there would be rest and shelter. Impatiently, however, Marnefesh commanded the underling to depart. It irked him till he should be alone beside the tomb, when man and beast should have vanished into the darkness, leaving him by himself beneath the expanse of heaven, to the emptiness, the incomprehensibility of the night.

When his wishes had been obeyed, he bent his head beside the grave to utter the prayer for the dead:

"Great is the name and holy is the name of the Eternal in this world and in other worlds and also in the days of the rising from the dead."

Strongly did he desire, in accordance with the pious custom, to lay a stone or some other recognizable indication upon the freshly shovelled earth; but, reminding himself of the need for secrecy, he refrained, and walked away from the tomb into the darkness, he knew not whither. He no longer had a purpose or a goal now that he had laid the Menorah to rest. Anxiety had departed from him, and his soul was at peace. He had fulfilled the task laid upon him. Now it was for God to decide whether the Lampstand should remain hidden until the end of days and the Chosen People scattered over the face of the earth, or whether, in the end, he would lead

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the Jews home and allow the Menorah to arise from its unknown grave.

The old man walked onward through the night beneath a sky in which the clouds were dispersing, allowing moon and stars to shine. At each step he rejoiced more and more heartily. As by a charm the burden of his years was falling from him, and he felt a sense of lightness and renewed energy such as he had not known since childhood. As if loosened by friction with warm oil, his aged limbs moved easily once more. He felt as a bird may feel flying free and happy over the waters. Head erect, shoulders squared, he marched joyfully like a young man. His right arm too (or was he dreaming) was again hale, so that he could use it as he willed—the arm that had been useless for eighty years since that morning at Portus. His blood coursed with renewed energy, as the sap rises in a tree during the springtime; there was a joyous throbbing in his temples, and he could hear the noise of a mighty singing. Was it the dead under the earth who sang a brotherly chorus to him in greeting, to him, the wanderer who had returned home; or was it the music of the spheres, was it the stars that sang to him as they shone ever more brightly? He did not know. He walked on and on through the rustling night, upborne by invisible pinions.

Next morning some traders on their way to market at Ramleh caught sight of a human form lying in an open field close to the road which led from Joppa to Jerusalem. An old man, dead. The unknown lay on his back, with bared head. His arms widespread, seeming ready to grasp the infinite, he had his fingers likewise opened, as if the palms were prepared to receive a bounteous gift. His eyes, too, were wide open and undismayed, his whole expression being peaceful. When one of the traders stooped, with the pious intention of

closing the dead man's eyes, he saw that they were full of light, and that in their round pupils the glory of the heavens was reflected.

The lips, however, were firmly closed, as if guarding a secret that was to endure after death.

A few weeks later the spurious Lampstand was likewise brought to Palestine, and, in accordance with Justinian's command, was placed beneath the altar in the church at Jerusalem. Not long, however, did it there abide. The Persians invaded the Holy City, seized the Seven-Branched Candlestick, and broke it up in order to make golden clasps for their wives and a golden chair for their king. Time continually destroys the work of human hands and frustrates human design; and so now was the emblem destroyed which Zechariah the goldsmith had made in imitation of the holy Candelabrum, and its trace for ever lost.

Hidden, however, in its secret tomb, there still watches and waits the everlasting Menorah, unrecognized and unimpaired. Over it have raged the storms of time. Century after century the nations have disputed one with another for possession of the Land of Promise. Generation after generation has awakened and then has slept; but no robber has seized the sacred emblem, nor could greed destroy it. Often enough a hasty foot passes over the ground beneath which it lies; often enough a weary traveller sleeps for an hour or two by the wayside close to which the Lampstand slumbers; but no one has the slightest inkling of its presence, nor have the curious ever dug down into the depths where it lies entombed. Like all God's mysteries, it rests in the darkness through the ages. Nor can anyone tell whether it will remain thus for ever and for ever, hidden away and lost to its people, who still know no peace in their wanderings through the lands of the Gentiles, or whether,

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at length, someone will dig up the Menorah on that day when the Jews come once more into their own. Only then will the Seven-Branched Lampstand diffuse its gentle light in the Temple of Peace.

THE LEGEND OF THE THIRD DOVE



IN the Book of Genesis there is written the story of the first dove and also of the second, which the patriarch Noah sent forth out of the Ark, when the windows of heaven were stopped and the waters of the deep abated. Yet who has told of the travels and the destiny of the third dove? The ship of salvation, carrying within it all life that was spared from the flood, had grounded upon the peak of Mount Ararat, but the patriarch from his mast-head could see nought save the rise and fall of an infinity of water; he therefore sent out a dove, the first dove, to bring him news of any land that might be seen beneath the lowering skies.

The first dove, so we are told, soared upwards and spread her wings. She flew to the East and to the West, but the waters were everywhere. She found no rest for the sole of her foot and gradually her wings began to weaken. So she returned to the one firm place on earth, to the Ark, and she fluttered about the ship which rested on the mountain peak, until Noah put forth his hand, and took her, and pulled her in unto him into the Ark.

Now he waited for seven days, seven days in which no rain fell and the waters sank; then he took another dove, the second, and sent her out to search. The dove flew out in the morning and when she returned at the evening she bore in her bill an olive leaf, the first sign that the earth was uncovered once again. Thus Noah learned that the treetops were already clear of the water and that the trial was surmounted.

After another seven days he once again sent forth a dove, the third, and she flew out into the world. In the morning she set forth, yet by evening she had not returned, and though Noah awaited her day after day, she never came back. Thus our ancestor knew that the earth was free and the waters sunken away. But of that dove, the third dove, he never heard again, nor did mankind either, for her legend has not been revealed until to-day.

These were the travels and the destiny of the third dove. In the morning she had flown forth from the ship's musty hold, where the beasts, crowded in darkness, stirred impatiently, hoof to claw, amidst a confusion of roaring and whistling, hissing and lowing; from confinement she flew forth into the infinity of space, from darkness into light. And when she spread her wings in the clear, clean air washed sweet by the rain she felt at once the freedom that was all about her and the grace of boundlessness. The waters of the deep glistened, the forests shone green as dewy moss, the mists of dawn drifted white across the meadows and those meadows were sweetly scented by the opening blossoms. Brightness poured down from the metallic sky to be mirrored below, so that the rising sun was reflected in a pink, eternal dawn upon the rocky mountain tops, while the sea shone blood-red and the flowering earth, too, steamed warm as blood. It was god-like to watch this awakening, and in an ecstasy of vision the dove floated across the purple world; easily she flew over lands and seas and in her dream slowly became herself a gliding dream. Like God Himself she was now the first to see the earth set free and there was no end to her looking. She had long ago forgotten Noah, the white-bearded captain of the Ark, she had forgotten her mission, she had forgotten that she must return. For the world was now her home, the heavens her very own house.

And so the third dove, the patriarch's faithless

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messenger, flew across the empty world, on and ever onwards, borne up by the violence of her joy, by the wind of her blissful unrest, ever onwards until her pinions grew heavy and her feathers leaden. The earth drew her down towards itself with a mighty force, her tired wings sank lower and lower so that already they grazed the damp treetops, and at last on the evening of the second day she settled down in the midst of a wood which, like everything else at time's beginning, was without a name. She hid deep in a thicket and rested from her journey through the skies. The twigs sheltered her, the breeze lulled her, the wood was cool by day and a warm dwelling-place by night. She soon forgot the windy heavens and the call of far places; embowered in the green trees, time grew over her, unreckoned.

It was a wood of the world close to us that the last dove had chosen for her home, but there were as yet no human beings within it, and in this solitude she gradually became a dream unto herself. In the darkness, in the green shade she nestled and the years passed her by and death forgot her, for of all those beasts—two of each breed which had seen the first world before the flood—none can ever die nor be harmed by the hunter. Invisible, they shelter in the hidden folds of earth's garment, and even so did this dove live deep in the forest. Sometimes, it is true, forebodings of the presence of man would reach her; a shot would ring out and be re-echoed a hundredfold from the walls of green; axes would be driven into the trunks so that the encircling darkness groaned; the soft laughter of lovers as they stole away together was a murmur in the undergrowth, and the songs of children picking berries came thinly from afar. The lost dove, enmeshed in foliage and in dream, sometimes heard those worldly voices, but they caused her no fear and she remained in her darkness.

But one day the whole wood began to roar and crack

as though the very world were falling apart. Black masses of metal screamed through the air and where they fell the earth leapt up in horror and the trees were snapped like grasses. Men in coloured clothes hurled death at one another and fearful machines spewed forth fire and flame. Lightning shot up from earth to clouds and after it thunder; it was as though the land wished to jump into the sky, or the sky to fall upon the land. The dove awakened from her dream. Death was all about her, and destruction; as once the water, so now fire was spread across the world. Quickly she stretched her wings and fluttered upwards, in search of a new home to replace her crashing, crackling wood, in search of a place where there was peace.

She fluttered upwards and flew across our world in search of peace, but go where she would she found everywhere the same man-made lightning, the same man-made thunder, everywhere was war. A sea of fire and blood had once again engulfed the earth, another flood had come, and quickly she flew across the land, searching for a place of rest whence she might return to the patriarch bearing the olive leaf of promise in her bill. But in these days none was to be found, ever higher rose the tide of ruin over mankind, while the flames raced ever on across the face of our world. She has not yet found a resting-place, nor humanity peace, and until then she may not return home, she may not be for ever still.

No man has seen her, the lost and mythical dove in her search for peace, but still she flutters over our heads, frightened and with pinions that are already weary. Sometimes, deep in the night, a man awakening from a startled sleep may hear wings beating high in the air, haste in darkness, anguished, unheeding flight. Upon her is the weight of all our sombre thoughts, in her fear are carried all our wishes, and there, fluttering between heaven and earth, is the lost dove. It is our own destiny

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that she now must learn, that she now must bear back, that faithless messenger of long ago, to the patriarch of mankind. And once again, as those thousands of years ago, the world is waiting, waiting that a hand be put forth to take her, waiting for the knowledge that the trial has been at last enough.

THE DISSIMILAR DOUBLES



EMERGING from an alleyway in a certain southern city, the name of which I should sooner not reveal, I was surprised to find myself confronted by a most impressive and magnificent building; it was of a very early period and was surmounted by two massive towers which were so alike that in the fading light one might well have been taken for the other's shadow. It was not a church, nor could it have been a palace of long ago; there was a monastic air to it and yet, with its broad and ponderous surfaces, it had a secular look, though one that defied identification. So, politely raising my hat, I accosted a rubicund citizen, who was drinking a glass of straw-coloured wine on the terrace of a small café, and asked him if he could oblige me with the name of this building that reared so powerfully above the low and pointed roofs of the surrounding houses. The man, who was clearly relishing his leisure, glanced up with surprise, then smiled with slow satisfaction, and finally replied: "I cannot answer your question with absolute certainty. According to the town map it may well have an altogether different name, but we still call it, as we have always done, the Sisters' House, perhaps because the two towers are so alike, but on the other hand perhaps . . ." He hesitated and carefully brushed the smile from his lips, as though he wished first of all to make sure that my apparent interest was genuine. But a half answer only whets a man's curiosity to hear the whole—so we fell into conversation and I willingly accepted his suggestion that I

try a glass of the bittersweet golden wine. Before us the outlines of the two towers glittered in the growing light of the rising moon, the wine was to my taste and so, too, on that lazy evening, was the little story of the two sisters, the dissimilar 'doubles, which he then told me, and which I here repeat as accurately as I can remember it, though I cannot vouch for its historic veracity.

Once upon a time King Theodosius's army found itself obliged to take up winter quarters in what was then the capital of Aquitania, an interlude of ample rest which brought back the silky sheen to the coats of their exhausted horses and, ultimately, boredom to the soldiery. Now it happened that the commander of the cavalry, a certain Lombard by the name of Herilunt, became enamoured of a beautiful girl who kept a shop, hidden in the obscure and twisting alleyways of the lower town, where she sold aromatic herbs and sweet honey-bread. So overwhelming was his passion to hold her in his arms that, despite her lowly birth, he married her with all speed and installed her in a princely house facing the market-square. There they remained, invisible for weeks on end, so wrapped up in one another that they forgot humanity and the passing of time and the king and the war. But while they were utterly sunk in love, slumbering the long nights through in each other's arms, time did not sleep. Suddenly a warm breeze blew from the south, and beneath its touch the ice melted in the streams while the meadows became brightly carpeted with crocuses and violets. From one day to the next the trees were decked with green: fat and sticky buds pushed through the long-frozen bark: spring arose from the soft, damp earth: and with the spring came the war again. One morning the lovers' slumber was broken by the martial and demanding blows of the brazen knocker at the gate; a messenger from the king ordered the leader

to arm his men and to march forth. The sound of the drum summoned the soldiers to their ranks, banners cracked out in the wind, and soon the market-place re-echoed with the clatter of the hooves of the horses, now saddled once more. Then Herilunt slipped quickly from the encircling arms of his winter wife, whom he loved so ardently: for stronger still there burned within his breast the fires of ambition and a manly lust for the field of battle. Heedless of her tears and harsh in his refusal of her plea that he take her with him, he left the woman in the big house and with his cavalry horde broke into Mauretania. In seven battles he overthrew the enemy: with a flaming broom he brushed aside the robber-castles of the Saracens: he smashed their cities and plundered on, ever victorious, to the coast, where he must needs hire sailboats and galleys in which to send home his booty, so enormous was it. Never had a victory been more quickly won, never a campaign more speedily concluded. It is therefore small wonder that the king, as recompense for so bold a warrior, bestowed upon him both the northern and the southern halves of the captured province as his fief, for him to administer against a small tribute to his monarch. Herilunt, whose home up to this had been his saddle, might now have enjoyed ample leisure and, indeed, have spent the rest of his life in a satiety of comfort. Yet his ambition was pricked on rather than calmed by his rapid triumphs, and now it became intolerable to him that he should be a subordinate, that he must pay a tribute to his master: only a royal circlet seemed to him bright enough to deck his wife's smooth brow. So he secretly encouraged his own troops to rebel against the king and began to arm them for an uprising. But, betrayed before he was ready, the conspiracy was a failure. Defeated even before the battle, banned by the church, and deserted by his own horsemen, Herilunt had to flee into the mountains and

there the peasants, for the sake of the great reward, clubbed the outlaw to death while he slept.

At the very moment when the king's men had found the bloody rebel corpse bedded in straw in a barn, when they were stripping it of jewels and clothing, when they were tossing the naked body into the carrion pit, at that very moment his wife, unaware of his fate, was giving birth in the great brocade bed of the palace to twin daughters, whom the bishop with his own hand, and amidst the jubilation of the city, christened Helena and Sophia. The bells were still ringing in the steeples, silver tankards were still clinking at the banquets, when the news of Herilunt's uprising and defeat arrived, to be quickly followed by a second messenger with the king's edict that the rebel's house and all his property were confiscated in the interest of the royal treasury. And so the fair shopkeeper, scarcely recovered from her confinement, had to leave the scenes of her brief glory and, wearing once again her thin, woollen dress, return to the musty alleyway in the lower town; only now in her misery she had two helpless children to support, and in her heart was the bitterness of so cruel a disillusion. Once again she sat from dawn to dusk on a low wooden bench within her booth while she offered her neighbours aromatic herbs and sweet honey cakes, while words of mockery often accompanied the few copper coins for which she must work so hard. Grief soon dulled her once bright eyes, and her hair early turned to grey. Yet soon she was to receive a recompense for her miseries and misfortune; this was the growing gaiety and the remarkable loving charm of the fair twins, two girls who had inherited their mother's radiant beauty, and who were so exactly alike, both in appearance and character, that each seemed to be the living mirror of the other's lovely being. It was not only strangers who failed to tell the identical twins apart; even their mother could never say

for sure which of the girls was Helena and which Sophia. So she made Sophia wear an armlet of cheap linen in order that by this sign she might distinguish her from her sister. But if it was only her voice she heard, or if she were gazing into the child's face, she never knew which name to speak. .

Now besides inheriting their mother's startling beauty, the twin sisters had also, and unfortunately, inherited their father's unruly ambitions and lust for power, so that each of them was for ever trying to excel the other and all her contemporaries in every way. Even, in their early years, when children usually play simple and disinterested games, the twins already brought to all their activities a high spirit of competition and of rivalry. Should a stranger, enchanted by the beauty of one little girl, place a pretty ring upon her finger without doing likewise to her sister, should one of the girls have a top which spun longer than the other's, their mother would as likely as not find the child who felt herself offended lying full length on the ground, her fists against her teeth, her heels beating furiously upon the floor. Neither would allow the other any praise, any affection, any superior achievement, and although so exactly alike that the neighbours nicknamed them "the little mirrors" they wasted their days and rendered themselves miserable with this continual, flaming, mutual jealousy. In vain did their mother attempt to control such unsisterly and exaggerated ambition, in vain did she try to loosen the ever tautening bow of rivalry; she was soon forced to realize that this was a hereditary misfortune which lived on in her still immature children, and the only small compensation for her worries was the fact that, thanks to this ceaseless rivalry, the two girls quickly became the cleverest and the quickest of their generation. For no sooner would one child begin to learn something than the other would strive impatiently to surpass her in

knowledge. And since they were both sturdily built and mentally quick, the twin sisters learned at a very early age all those things that a useful and attractive woman must needs know, such as : how to weave linen, how to dye stuffs, how to set jewellery, to play the flute, to dance gracefully, how to compose artistic verses and then to accompany them pleasantly upon the lute, and finally, accomplishments superior to those of most courtly women of the age, they studied Latin, geometry, and the higher learning of the philosophers, being instructed in these subjects by an amiable deacon. Soon enough there was not a girl to be found in all Aquitania who could be compared with the shopkeeper's two daughters for attractiveness of body or for elegance and accomplishment of mind. Yet no man could have said which of the twins should receive the palm for perfection, since so utterly alike were Helena and Sophia that it was impossible to tell them apart either from their appearance or by their vivacity or from their conversation.

With a love of the fine arts and the knowledge of all those delicate and gentle matters which impart to the spirit as to the body a yearning that always leads from narrowness to the infinity of sentiment, there soon awakened within the two girls' breasts a burning dissatisfaction with their mother's lowly estate. After a debate at the academy, where they had jealously and eagerly juggled arguments with the most learned doctors, or returning home, their heads still filled with music, from a group of dancers to their musty alleyway, they would find their mother sitting with unkempt hair behind her spices, haggling over half a dozen gingernuts and gaining a few tarnished copper coins ; then they would be angrily ashamed of her stubborn misery, and the frayed straw mats on which they slept would seem an insult to their glowing and still virginal bodies. They would lie awake far into the night cursing a fate that had

treated them thus; the superiors of noblewomen both in mind and body, they should be dressed in soft and silken clothes and bedizened with jewels, yet here they lay in this stuffy hovel and the best that they could hope for was marriage with the cooper who lived on their left or the cutler who lived on their right; and were they not the daughters of a great warrior, royal by blood as by right of sentiment? They longed for apartments polished till they shone and for a train of servants, for riches and power, and when, as occasionally happened, a noblewoman would pass by in a mantle trimmed with fur, her swaying chair escorted by falconers and men-at-arms and enveloped in the faint delicacy of her perfume, their cheeks would grow as white with rage as were the teeth between their lips. The violence and arrogance of their rebel father would then course powerfully through their veins; even as he had done, they, too, refused to accept a modest life, a limited destiny; and day and night they thought of nothing save how best to escape their unworthy existence.

Thus it happened, unexpectedly but not inexplicably, that Sophia awoke one morning to find the pallet beside her own deserted: Helena, her double and counterpart in all her desires, had secretly vanished during the night. The mother was both startled and upset, fearing lest her daughter had been forcibly abducted by some nobleman—for already many a young man had been affected and indeed driven near to madness by the double beauty of the two sisters. Throwing her clothes on haphazard, she hastened to the prefect who administered their town in the king's name, and demanded that he arrest the criminal. He promised to do so. Yet already, on the following day, rumours, ever more precise and ever more bitterly shaming to the mother, began to be spread throughout the town; Helena, though scarcely nubile, had eloped entirely of her own free will with a young

nobleman who for her sake had ransacked and plundered his father's chests and coffers. A week later worse news was to follow. Travellers told of the arrogant fashion in which the young strumpet, was living with her lover in another town, surrounded by servants and falcons and strange tropical beasts, wrapped in furs and glittering brocade, a scandal to all the honest women of the place. People had scarcely stopped repeating and discussing these evil tidings when worse followed: wearying of her youthful paramour, Helena had hardly waited for him to empty his sacks and his pockets, before installing herself in the palace of the immensely old town treasurer, where she sold her young body for fresh splendour and proceeded mercilessly to plunder the old miser. Within a few weeks she had plucked all his golden feathers and left him, an aged and naked boiling fowl ready for the pot, for a new lover, whom she quickly deserted for a richer, and soon there could be no illusions left—throughout the countryside it was common gossip that Helena was selling her young body with the same industry that her mother at home sold herbs and sweet honeybread. In vain did the unhappy widow send message after message to her abandoned daughter, urging that she cease from thus debasing her father's memory: the mother's cup of shame was filled to overflowing when one day a splendid cavalcade came trotting down the road that passed beneath the town gate. Outriders came first, in scarlet livery, and then a troop of cavalry as for a prince's escort, and there in the middle, among her Afghan hounds and her exotic monkeys, was Helena, the precocious courtesan, the very reincarnation of that first Helen who had also known how to turn a rich man's head, and dressed like the Queen of Sheba when that lady had entered Jerusalem in all her glory. Jaws dropped, tongues wagged: artisans left their factories, scribes their tablets, a crowd of gaping, gossiping people

flocked about the cavalcade until at last, in the market-place, the escort of horsemen and servants stopped and fell back to honour the new arrival. The curtains were drawn and finally the youthful courtesan alighted; arrogantly she stepped across and through the doorway of that selfsame palace which had once been her father's and which an infatuated lover had bought back from the royal treasury to bestow upon her in exchange for three nights passed in her arms. As though entering into an inalienable inheritance, she walked through the majestic chamber with the gorgeous bed where her mother had given her honourable birth, and soon the long deserted rooms were filled with costly statues of pagan artistry. Cool marble replaced the wooden staircases, joining at top and bottom artistic tilings and mosaics; woven tapestries filled with portraits and incident clothed the walls warmly like multi-coloured ivy, gold plate covered the boards during banquets enriched with music; for, skilled in every art, irresistibly young and seductively witty, Helena soon became mistress, too, of all the arts of love, and the wealthiest of courtesans. From the neighbouring towns and even from abroad rich men flocked to her, Christian, heathen and heretic alike, in order at least once to enjoy her favours, and since her lust for power was no smaller than had been her father's ambition, she callously turned the screw and cruelly garrotted the men's passion until she had squeezed their very last possessions from them. Even the king's own son had to pay bitter ransom to pawnbrokers and money-lenders when, after a week of lust, he left Helena's arms and Helena's house, still drunk and yet horribly sobered.

Small wonder that such arrogant behaviour infuriated the honest women of the town, and particularly the older ones. In the churches the priests delivered impassioned sermons against the corruption of youth, in the market-place the women shook their fists and on more than one

night stones rattled against Helena's windows and front door. But disapproving as the respectable ladies might be, not to mention the fury of those widows the abandoned wives, and the jealousy of those older, more experienced women-of-the-town who suddenly found this impatient young filly cropping their finest meadows—none of these persons burned with such strong and uncontrolled anger as did Sophia, her own sister. It was not the fact that Helena had embarked on so disreputable a career which mortified Sophia's very soul, but rather regret that she herself had once failed to accept the same proposition from the same young nobleman, and that thus her sister had achieved all her own heart's desires, power over human beings and a voluptuous life: whereas the winter winds still whistled by night through her chill bedroom, competing with her mother's shrill recriminations. It is true that her sister, in luxuriant awareness of her wealth, had on more than one occasion sent her valuable clothes; yet Sophia's pride forbade the acceptance of charity. Nor could her jealousy be soothed by ingloriously following in her bolder sister's footsteps and competing with her for lovers as once they had competed for sweet gingerbread. Her victory, she felt, must be more perfect. And while Sophia pondered day and night how best she might surpass the other in fame and glory, she became ever more aware, from the ever more violent admiration which she excited in the men about her, that the one modest possession which was hers—her maidenhood and her unsullied honour—was in itself a valuable attraction and at the same time a commodity of which a clever girl could make great use. And so she decided to exploit precisely that which her sister had so precociously cast away, and to make her virtue as conspicuous and as renowned as was the courtesan's young body. If the latter was celebrated for her overweening arrogance, then she would be equally famous for her humble

modesty. And malicious tongues had not yet ceased to wag about Helena's scandals before, one morning, the astonished town found a new feast for its gossip: Sophia, twin sister to Helena the courtesan, had, out of shame and a desire to atone for her sister's evil ways, fled the world and entered upon a novitiate in a certain pious order of women who devoted their days in unflagging energy to the care and relief of the sick in the town infirmary. All those lovers who now realized that they had delayed too long tore their hair in the realization that this flawless gem was passed beyond their reach. The pious, on the other hand, could not resist the rare opportunity of contrasting the sensual abandonment of the one with the fine spectacle of Godly devotion given by the other, and spread the news so zealously abroad that soon there was no maiden more discussed and praised in all Aquitania than Sophia, the girl who had sacrificed herself, who waited day and night upon the diseased and the deformed, and who did not even shrink from tending lepers. Women curtsied to her when they passed her, walking with downcast eyes, in the street; the bishop praised her in a sermon which he repeated more than once, extolling her as the most splendid example of female virtue; and children gazed at her as they might upon a brilliant star. Suddenly—and as may be well imagined, much to her annoyance—it was not Helena that all the country watched, it was not of Helena that everybody spoke, but solely of the snowy sacrificial victim, of the girl who had offered herself as an atonement of sin, and who had soared like a dove into the heavens of humility.

For the next few months a curious double star now shone above the astonished land, as pleasing to the sinner as it was to the pious. For if the former were only too enchanted by the sumptuous joys offered by Helena the latter could, and did, fortify their souls with the spectacle

of Sophia's brilliant virtue, and thanks to this proximity of opposites it seemed that here, in this Aquitanian town, for the first time since the creation of the world, the Kingdom of God was clearly and plainly contrasted with and separated from its counterpart. For him who loved purity, the guardian angel was there, while he who was sunk in the ways of the flesh was offered every earthly pleasure in the arms of her unworthy sister. But in every human heart here below there are concealed certain twisting, hidden passageways and tunnels which lead from good to evil, from flesh to spirit, and it was not long before it became apparent that this dichotomy of absolutes was in itself a most serious menace to the peace of the soul. For since the sisters, utterly unlike as were their ways of life, remained physically indistinguishable, of the same build, the same colouring, the same smile and the same charm, it was only natural that a confusion of passions should arise among the men of the town. Thus a young man emerging into the fresh air after an ardent night in Helena's arms, with the intention of cleansing his soul of the sinful creature, would start back as though he had seen the devil himself. For the fair novice in her modest nurse's grey was there, pushing a coughing old man in a wheelchair through the hospital gates as, without apparent disgust, she carefully and gently wiped the spittle from about his toothless mouth; and to the young man she seemed the very same woman whom he had just left, naked and feverishly passionate, in her bed of lust. He might stare more closely: yes, they were the same lips, the same smooth and tender gestures, though now serving a love more sublime than that of us humans here below. He stared and his eyes glowed as though they would slowly burn their way through the plain, grey garment to discover beneath it the body of the courtesan which he knew so well. The same confusion of the senses affected those who, having just

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assisted respectfully at a devout visit from the virtuous hospital nurse, would round the corner to be confronted by a chaste Sophia extraordinarily transformed, her breasts uncovered and her garments opulently sensual, as surrounded by lovers and servants she hastened to some banquet. This is Helena, not Sophia, they would assure themselves, and yet henceforth they could no longer think of the devout sister without imagining her naked, and in this way did their very respect grow impious. Thus did the senses vacillate between the two sisters and become only the more confused as those senses refused, as they often do, to obey the dictates of will. Young men in the mercenary arms of the one would dream of the other's untouched body, or gaze upon the pious Samaritan with the heavy eyes of desire. For the creator of the world, in his own inscrutable fashion, has seen fit to set men's senses askew, so that in women what they desire is always the opposite of that which they are vouchsafed. If one gives her body easily, then they are scarcely thankful for the gift and behave as though it were only innocence that they could truly love. On the other hand a woman who defends her innocence only incites them sevenfold to snatch that innocence from her. That is why no desire can fulfil and satisfy the duality of man, the eternal oscillation between flesh and spirit: here, however, some imp had tied a double knot, for the courtesan and the pious novice, Helena and Sophia, seemed externally to be so exactly one and the same body that no man could tell the one from the other and no man could now know for sure which of the two he actually desired. Thus it came about that the town wastrels were to be seen about the hospital even more than in the taverns, while the debauchees enticed the courtesan with their gold to don a nursing sister's garment for their orgies, thus completing the illusion that they had enjoyed the untouchable, that they had ravished

Sophia herself. The whole town, indeed the whole country, was soon involved in this senseless and exacerbating game of make-belief and interchange; nothing that the bishop might say nor any edict of the governor could now control the scandal daily renewed.

Now instead of resigning themselves as sisters should, and finding satisfaction in the fact that the one was the town's richest woman while the other was the most devout and both were encompassed with admiration and honour, the two ambitious women were grimly pre-occupied with one thought, how best to do the other an injury. Sophia bit her lips with fury when she learned how her sister made a sinful masquerade of her pious self-sacrifice. Helena for her part expressed her rage by whipping her servants when these told her stories of foreign pilgrims prostrating themselves respectfully before Sophia and of women kissing the dust that her shoes had touched. The greater the evil that the two violent creatures wished upon one another, and the bitterer their mutual hatred, the deeper grew the sympathy that each affected to feel for her sister. At the banqueting table, in a voice breaking with emotion, Helena would express her pity for a sister who thus senselessly sacrificed her pleasures and her youth for the sake of looking after wizened old men who in any case were obviously bound to die in the very near future; each day Sophia ended her eventide devotions with a special prayer for poor sinners who so foolishly exchanged the higher satisfactions of a life spent in the good works of charity for the fleeting pleasures of damnation. But when both of them realized that all their messages and emissaries were incapable of diverting the other from her chosen path, they began to draw gradually closer together; even so will two wrestlers draw closer together, unintentionally it would seem, while each plans and prepares the decisive stratagem that will defeat the other. With increasing

frequency they would call upon one another, feigning sisterly concern, while in fact each of them would willingly have given her soul for the pleasure of doing the other the ultimate injury.

Now Sophia, the arrogantly humble, had once again gone, after vespers, to visit her sister with the purpose of warning her yet more and in the strongest terms to desist from her evil ways. She had repeated at length her oration to her impatient and beautiful sister, she had expounded her wickedness in transforming the body that God had bestowed upon her into a veritable thicket of sinfulness. Helena, who was engaged at the time in having that God-given body anointed with precious oils by her maid-servants, in order that it might be better prepared for its outrageous trade, listened with a mixture of anger and amusement, while wondering whether to drive her boring lecturer into a frenzy with blasphemous pleasantries or whether it would not be better still to confound and embarrass her by ordering that youths be summoned to her chamber. And then, suddenly, a curious thought brushed her brow; it buzzed as lightly as a fly, this thought, a truly devilish one, so dangerous and so sly that she could scarce withhold an inner chuckle. And in a moment her shamelessness was laid aside, maid-servants and attendants were dismissed, and no sooner was she alone with her sister than a veil of contrition hid the inner sparkle of her eyes. Ah, her sister must not suppose—thus did she begin, skilled as she was in all the acts of deception—that she had not herself often felt shame for the wickedness and the folly of the path she followed. Over and over again disgust had overwhelmed her as she submitted to the goatish lechery of men, repeatedly she had decided to have nothing more to do with them and henceforth to live a simple, honest life. Yet she felt that all her resistance would be vain, for Sophia, strong of soul and never, like herself, a victim

to the weaknesses of the flesh, could not conceive of men's powers of seduction, powers which no experienced woman could resist. Ah, she could not guess, fortunate Sophia, at the violence of a man's insistence, nor that this very violence was strangely sweet, so that a woman must give in to it even against her will.

Sophia, completely taken aback by an admission the like of which she had never thought to hear from the lips of her gold- and pleasure-loving sister, hastily marshalled all her powers of persuasion. At last Helena had been touched by the ray of God's grace: thus did she open her sermon, for that very disgust with sinfulness was in itself the first sign of true repentance. Yet error and a lack of self-confidence still clouded her spirit when she maintained that it was not possible for a strong will to repel the onslaughts of the flesh: the desire for the good, once it is firmly established in a person's heart, can overcome every temptation, as the example of countless individuals, heathen and believer alike, has proved. Helena only bowed her head in sadness. That was all very well, she complained, she too had read with admiration tales of heroic fights against the devil of sensuality. But God had bestowed upon men not only greater physical strength, but also a sturdier spirit, so that they were equipped to be victorious warriors in the divine struggle. Never—and now she uttered a deep sigh—never could a poor weak woman withstand the guiles and the seductions of the male, nor was there in history any single example of a woman who had ever succeeded in resisting the love of man when truly and pressingly urged to surrender.

"How can you say such a thing?" hissed Sophia, spurred on by her boundless arrogance. "Am not I myself an example of how a determined will can successfully resist the brutish advances of men? They are after me from dawn to dusk, they creep into the very sick-beds in pursuit of me, and when I retire at night I find

letters filled with the most shameless proposals waiting on my pillow. And yet nobody has seen me so much as favour one of them with a glance, so well does my firmness of will shield me from all temptation. What you maintain is therefore not true: so long as a woman truly desires to resist, she has the strength to do so. I myself am the example of this."

"Ah, yes, I am well aware that hitherto you have indeed succeeded in resisting every temptation," false Helena replied, glancing up at her sister with feigned humility, "but you have only managed to do so because, fortunate being that you are, you have your habit to protect you and the hard life of service that you have embraced. You are guarded by the pious sisters of your order, cut off from the world by the sheltering walls of your community—you are not alone, you are not defenceless as am I! But do not therefore suppose that it is to your own strength that you owe your purity, for I am utterly convinced, Sophia, that even you, were you to find yourself face to face with a young man, would have neither the strength nor the desire to resist him. You would surrender yourself to him even as we all do."

"Never! I never would!" the arrogant girl replied with heat. "I swear that even without the protection of my habit I could, by the strength of my will alone, surmount any trial."

Now these were precisely the words which Helena had hoped to hear Sophia utter. Step by step she cunningly enticed her nearer to the trap that she had laid; nor did she cease to doubt her sister's powers of resistance until at last Sophia herself insisted that the question be put to a decisive test. She desired such a trial, or rather she demanded it, for only thus could she compel her weak-willed sister to realize that it was solely to her own strength and determination, and not to external protection, that she owed her purity. Then Helena feigned to

ponder—while her heart within her was beating with evil impatience—until at last she said: “Listen, Sophia, perhaps this were the truest test. To-morrow night I am expecting Sylvander, the handsomest youth in all the land whom no woman has so far resisted and who yet desires me above all else. He is riding eight and twenty miles on my behalf and is bearing with him eight pounds of the purest gold as well as other gifts, solely in exchange for one night in my arms. Yet were he to come bare-handed I should not send him away, indeed I should buy his embrace with an equal weight of gold, for none is fairer than he nor more skilled in the art of love. Now God has created in each of us the very image of the other, both in face and in manner and in figure, so that were you to put on my dress no man would perceive the deception. Therefore to-morrow you will await Sylvander in my place in my house, and you will dine with him. And when he desires your body, believing it to be mine, you will defend your virtue with all the weapons which you can muster. Meanwhile I shall wait in the next apartment and shall hear whether you can succeed in blinding your senses to him until the hour of midnight. But once again, sister, I warn you: great is the temptation of his presence and more dangerous still the weakness of our own hearts. I fear, sister, that you have been misled by the retirement in which you have passed your days, and that you are venturing into temptations the nature of which you do not understand. Therefore I would urge you once again rather to desist from so perilous a game.”

While the sly Helena thus simultaneously enticed her sister onwards and urged her to retreat, her cunning words were but so much oil on the flames of the other's arrogance. If it was only so petty a trial as that, Sophia proudly boasted, she could easily surmount it, indeed not only until midnight: she could and would remain mistress of herself and resist all his wily assaults until the break of

day. She had only one request to make—that she be permitted to carry a dagger lest the young man in his impudence should dare to lay violent hands upon her.

At these proud words Helena fell on her knees before her sister, apparently overcome by admiration but actually in order to hide the wicked pleasure that was shining in her eyes. Thus did they agree that on the following evening the pious Sophia should receive Sylvander: Helena for her part swore to abandon for ever her evil ways should her sister successfully defend her honour. Sophia hurried home to her companions in order that she might draw an increase to her own strength from those women who were so magnificently withdrawn from the world and whose lives were devoted solely to the misery and sickness of others. She tended the most difficult and most desperate patients with redoubled devotion, that she might be the more forcibly reminded by those frail and broken bodies of the transitory nature of all that is earthly: for had not these twisted rotten bodies once belonged to lovers, had not they, too, once been the vessels of passion? And what now remained? A living corpse, a decrepit husk with scarce the strength to draw breath.

Meanwhile Helena, for her part, had not been idle. Skilled in all the arts that can conjure up Eros and in those, too, which can restrain that temperamental divinity once he has been aroused, she began by instructing her Calabrian chef that he prepare certain dishes of a very special sort, dishes dangerously seasoned with all the incitements to sensual abandon. She ordered that the pasties contain rutting beaver and mandrake, peppered with cantharides, while the wine was to be darkened with hen-bane and other strong herbs calculated speedily to dull the wits. At the same time she arranged for music, for she would not dispense with that arch-coupler which creeps like a zephyr about the soul

that longing has laid bare. Subtle flautists and ardent cymbalists were to be concealed in a neighbouring room, invisible and thus all the more of a peril to unwittingly heated senses. Having thus carefully laid the fire beneath the devil's cauldron, she waited with impatience for the contest to begin; and when evening came and the arrogantly devout Sophia arrived, pale from her vigil and tense with awareness of the approaching dangers to which she had agreed to submit herself, she was surrounded on the very threshold by an eager flock of young maid-servants who immediately led the astonished nun to a bath scented with sweet-smelling herbs. There they stripped her blushing, youthful form of the grey habit of every day and rubbed her arms, her thighs, her back with crushed blossoms and with sharply scented ointment, so gently and yet so firmly that the very blood seemed to prickle through her pores. Now refreshingly cold water, now warm lapped her trembling skin: then quick hands soothed her heated torso with the white oil of the narcissus flower, kneading it softly and finally inflaming it once again by stroking her with cat fur, rubbing until blue sparks sprang from the tippets: in brief they prepared the pious girl, who did not venture to resist their ministrations, even as they made Helena ready each evening for the sports of love. Meanwhile the insistent flutes played irresistibly on, and from the torches on the walls there came the scent of burning sandalwood mingled with wax. When at last Sophia, highly distraught by these strange goings on, might lie down to rest upon the couch and saw her own face in the bronze mirror held out to her, she seemed a stranger to herself and more beautiful than she had ever been before. Her body felt ethereally light, a single, living desire, and she was deeply ashamed that she found such well-being so very pleasurable. Yet her sister did not leave her for long to these equivocal sensations. Soft as a panther she

came into the chamber and praised her sister's beauty in such flattering and unmeasured terms, that at last the latter in her confusion rebuffed her rudely. Once again the two sisters fell into a hypocritical embrace, the one trembling with disquiet and anxiety, the other with impatience and evil lust. Then Helena ordered that the lights be lit and disappeared like a shadow into the neighbouring apartment, thence to observe the spectacle she had so boldly devised.

Now the strumpet had already sent a message to Sylvander telling him of the strange adventure that awaited him and urging him in the strongest terms to assume a reticent and thoroughly modest mien and manner in order thus to disarm her proud sister's fears and to put her off her guard. And when Sylvander, his curiosity aroused by this wager which he was anxious to win, at last entered the chamber and Sophia involuntarily closed her left hand over the dagger with which she planned to protect herself against violence, she was astonished by the polite and respectful manner in which this reputedly impertinent libertine addressed her. For, as a result of the detailed instructions which he had received from her sister, he neither attempted to take the trembling girl in his arms nor did he offend her ears with words of intimacy, but simply knelt before her in quiet humility. Then, from the hands of the retainer who stood behind him, he took a most heavy chain of gold and a purple mantle of Provençal silk, craving her permission to lay the one about her shoulders and to hang the other across her throat. To so modest and decent a suggestion Sophia could not but give her consent; motionless she let him put the chain and the rich mantle about her, though she could not help feeling the seductive lightness of his warm fingers which stroked her nape at the same moment as did the cool chain. Yet since Sylvander attempted no further audacity, Sophia had no reason for premature

annoyance. Far from pressing his suit, the hypocrite bowed once again and said, in tones of uttermost shame, that he felt himself unworthy to dine at her table since the dust of the road was still upon him and begged her leave to withdraw in order first to wash his hair and body. In confusion Sophia summoned the maid-servants and ordered that Sylvander be taken to the baths. But the maids, obeying a secret instruction from their mistress and deliberately feigning to misunderstand Sophia's words, rapidly stripped the young man's clothing from him, so that he stood before her as naked and beautiful as the statue of Apollo which had graced the market-place until the bishop ordered it smashed in pieces. Then they first rubbed his body with oil, bathed his feet in warm water, in leisurely fashion entwined roses in the locks of the naked, laughing youth, and only when that was done did they cover him with a clean garment. And when he now came towards her, freshly adorned, he seemed even more beautiful than before. But she, though scarcely aware of the effect his charms were having upon her, yet blamed her own eyes for her weakness and reached for the dagger beneath her gown to reassure herself that at least that means of salvation was still with her. Yet she was given no reason to use it, for she and the young man proceeded to converse, at a respectful distance, with all the friendly courtesy of two learned doctors at the academy, though the subjects which they discussed were of a trivial nature; and what is more—and this caused her irritation rather than satisfaction—she was given no opportunity to impress her sister, listening next door, with an example of how a woman of virtue defends her purity. For in order that virtue may be defended it must first, as is well known, be assaulted. However, no storm of passion threatened her from Sylvander, and only a faint and gentle zephyr of politeness was mingled with the easy air of his conversation,

while the flutes which played ever louder in the neighbouring apartment spoke more of love than did the young man's red and usually covetous lips. He talked ceaselessly of jousting and feats of arms, even as though he were seated with a company of men friends, and his feigned indifference was so masterly that Sophia was rendered totally heedless thereby. Without thought she enjoyed the dangerously spiced dishes and the smoothly deceptive wine. Indeed, impatience and gradual irritation grew within her as this cool gentleman still gave her not the faintest chance to prove the stubborn quality of her virtue; at last she began herself arrogantly to create dangers in order that by flouting them she might confound her sister. She heard a laugh that was strange to her bubbling forth from her own throat, and felt a gay urge to jump up and then to throw herself back on her couch for sheer exhilaration; and she made no attempt to control such urges, nor did she feel shame, for was not midnight close upon them, the dagger to hand and the allegedly lusty youth as cold as its iron sheath? She moved closer and ever closer to him so that her virtue might at last be given a chance of glorious self-defence, and the foolish girl, in her proud desire to display the solidity of her virtue, unwittingly spun exactly those same seductive nets in which her unchaste sister was accustomed to catch earthly prizes.

But the proverb says that no man should touch a hair of the devil's head lest he find himself caught by the nape of the neck. A similar fate befell the vain girl in her anxiety for the strife. For, unaccustomed as she was to the wine and to the hidden lusts that it concealed, befuddled by the ever stronger scent from the torches, softly weakened by the lulling melody of the flutes, all her senses became gradually confused. Her laughter changed to babbling, her pride to ravenous desire, and no doctor of either faculty could have sworn before a

court of law whether it was in waking that it happened or in sleep, whether in sobriety or drunkenness, whether by her own choice or against her will—but, to be brief, it happened and long before the chimes of midnight struck, it happened even as God or his counterpart has decided that it must at last happen between man and woman. The hidden dagger clattered from her loosened gown to the marble floor; yet, remarkably enough, the weary, pious girl did not retrieve it, a second Lucrece, nor did she turn it against the youth now so dangerously close; indeed in the next apartment no sounds were heard of weeping or defiance. And when, on the stroke of midnight, the corrupt sister broke into what was now the bridal chamber accompanied by her train of servants, and eagerly raised her torch above the couch where the other lay stretched in defeat, there were no more secrets to be concealed nor modesty to be preserved. Then the saucy maid-servants strewed the couch, in the pagan style, with roses even redder than the blushing girl, who only now became giddily aware of her womanly folly. But her sister warmly embraced the distracted creature, the flutes sang out, the cymbals clashed as though Pan had at last returned to this Christian earth, the saucy maid-servants stripped naked and danced a dance in praise of Eros the rejected god. Then the leaping, twisting troop of bacchantes kindled a fire of aromatic twigs and with greedy tongues the flames devoured the pious habit of a nun thus sacrificed to mockery. As for the new hetæra, who was ashamed to admit defeat and who smiled confusedly in an attempt to show that she had of her own free will given herself to the young man, they adorned her with the same roses that her sister wore, and thus they stood side by side, the one glowing with shame the other in a fever of triumph, and no man could then have said which was Sophia and which Helena, which the supposedly chaste and humble which the arrogant

and lustful; and the young man's eyes went greedily from the one to the other in an ever renewed and redoubled impatience of desire.

Meanwhile the elated horde of bacchantes had flung wide the doors and windows of the palace. Revellers and the gayer elements of the populace, soon awakened by the noise, converged amidst laughter on the scene, and before ever the sun had risen above the rooftops the news had spread through the streets, like water gurgling through gutters, of the splendid victory which Helena had won over the sage Sophia, unchastity over chastity. As for the men of the town, scarce had they heard how this long-preserved virtue had been overthrown than they hurried, hot with desire, to find (nor was the shameful fact hidden) an equally warm welcome; for Sophia, as rapidly changed in spirit as she had been overthrown in body, remained with her sister Helena and strove only to be her equal in zeal and frenzy. Now was all strife and envy at an end, and since they both followed the same iniquitous trade the two evil sisters lived henceforth together in the same house and in the blithest amity. They adopted identical hairstyles, they wore identical ornaments, their gowns were of identical cut, and since the twins were now no longer distinguishable in laughter or in words of love, an ever new and voluptuous sport was created for lusty men, a riddle-me-ree of glances and kisses and embraces to guess whether it were the strumpet Helena or the former prude Sophia whom they held in their arms. Yet only rarely did a man succeed in discovering on which of the two he was wasting his money, so completely identical in appearance were they, and furthermore the clever pair took special pleasure in fooling the curious.

Thus, and not for the first time in this world of deceit, Helena had conquered Sophia, beauty wisdom, vice virtue, the all too willing flesh the weak and arrogant spirit;

once again was proved what Job had already lamented in his memorable oration, that the evil flourished on earth while the goodly were cast down and the righteous became a mockery. For in all the land no tax gatherer or tithe farmer, no publican or usurer, no goldsmith or master-baker, no cut-purse or church robber filled such huge coffers with the produce of his trade as did the two sisters with their smooth lusters. Loyal partners now, they milked the thickest wallets and emptied the best filled coffers, while gold and jewellery flocked to them like mice into a darkened house. And since, in addition to their mother's beauty, they had also inherited her trader's acumen, the twin sisters in no wise squandered this wealth, as is customary among women of that profession, in vain frivolity; too clever for that, they lent money on interest, only against the best security of course, allowing it thus to fatten in the pocket of Christian or heathen or Jew, and so skilled were they in controlling their investments that soon there had never been assembled so much wealth in the form of coin and cameos, sure bonds and valid bills, as was to be found in that evil household. Small wonder, then, that with such an example before their eyes the young maidens of that country no longer wished to be scullery hands or to stand over a washtub while their fingers turned blue; and soon the city was famous among towns as a second Sodom, thanks to the wicked presence of these two sisters now at last united.

Yet there is another old proverb which also contains its truth: no matter how fast the devil may ride, he will break his leg before he reaches his goal. Thus here, too, the mischief ended in most edifying fashion. For as year succeeded year the men began gradually to weary of attempting to solve an unchanging riddle. Guests were less frequent, the torches which lit the house were snuffed at an earlier hour, and soon all the world, save only the

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sisters, knew what the silent mirrors whispered to the guttering candles: that tiny wrinkles nestled beneath overtired eyes and that the sheen like mother-of-pearl was fading from skins that were slowly losing their pristine tautness. In vain did they attempt, with artifice, to buy back what pitiless nature was stealing with each passing hour; in vain did they dye the grey hairs at the corners of the brow, or try with knives of ivory to rub away each new unwelcome wrinkle, or paint with red the lips of their tired mouths; the years that they had squandered so furiously were now not to be gainsaid, and scarcely had the sisters lost the blush of youth before they found that they had also lost the interest of men. For while their blooms fell, ever fresh girls in the nearby streets were opening their blossoms, a new crop every year, soft little creatures with small breasts and saucy curls, and with bodies so far untouched and therefore doubly attractive to man's desire. Thus did it grow ever quieter in the house on the market-place, while the hinges on the door began to rust; vainly the torches burned and the resin gave out its scent; there was no man to be warmed by the glowing hearth nor by the sisters' embellished bodies. The bored flautists, since no one came to hear their seductive music, played endless games of dice, and the porter, whose duty it was to open the gate for the non-existent guests, grew plump from oversleep. In an upper room the two sisters sat alone at the big table which had once re-echoed with peals of merry laughter, and since there were now no lovers with whom to pass the hours, they had no better amusement than to regale each other with memories of time past. Especially Sophia remembered with longing the days when, alone and far from all earthly desires, she had lived a serious and godly life; thus did she frequently nowadays take in her hands her old and dusty volumes of pious writings, for women are readily attracted by

wisdom once their beauty has fled from them. And thus in the spirit of the two sisters was a marvellous transformation brought slowly about; for even as in the days of their youth the strumpet Helena had prevailed upon the devout Sophia, so now it came about that Sophia—belatedly, it is true, and after great sinfulness—found a listener in her all too earthly sister when she spoke to her of renunciation. There was a secret coming and going in the early hours of dawn: first it was Sophia who slipped quietly into the infirmary, there to beg forgiveness, and then it was Helena who accompanied her, and when the two sisters announced their wish to donate all their ill-gotten fortune, unconditionally and for ever, to that establishment, even the most distrustful could no longer doubt the earnestness of their repentance.

Thus it happened that one morning, while the porter still slumbered, two women in simple garb and with veiled heads came quietly out of the proud house on the market-place. In some ways their shy and humble demeanour recalled that of another woman, their mother, when fifty years before she, too, had left her brief and rapid opulence to return to the lowly alleyway of her poverty. Cautiously they crept through the half-opened gate; after a lifetime spent in unmeasured ostentation designed to draw upon themselves the attention of an entire country, they now covered their faces that no one might know the way they had chosen and that they might fulfil their destiny in humility far from the world's eyes. It is said that they retired to a convent in a distant land where none knew of their origin, and it is said—though no man could speak for sure—that there, after many years in silent retreat, they died. Moreover, so vast were the treasures which they had bequeathed to the infirmary, so enormous the wealth which was realized by the sale of the gold and the bangles, the coins and jewels and bonds, that it was decided to build a new

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infirmary, a hospital which should be the city's ornament and crown, a building both finer and larger than any yet seen in the land of Aquitania. A master-builder from the north drew the plans, for twenty years a horde of masons worked day and night, and when at last the great work was completed the crowd gaped with astonishment. For surmounting it was not the customary, single, square tower rearing proud and rough-hewn against the sky. No, above the hospital there rose two delicate, feminine towers, finely pointed, the one on the right, the other on the left, and so exactly alike were they in size and shape and in the sweet beauty of their polished stone that from the very first day the people nicknamed them "the sisters." Maybe they called them so because of their external resemblance; or maybe because the people, who at all times love to hand down memorable events across the years and across the centuries too, did not wish that the story of the worldly life and the metamorphosis of the sisters, those dissimilar doubles, should be forgotten. At least the tale survived, to be told to me at midnight beneath the moon by that worthy citizen who was perhaps not uninfluenced by the wine which we had drunk.